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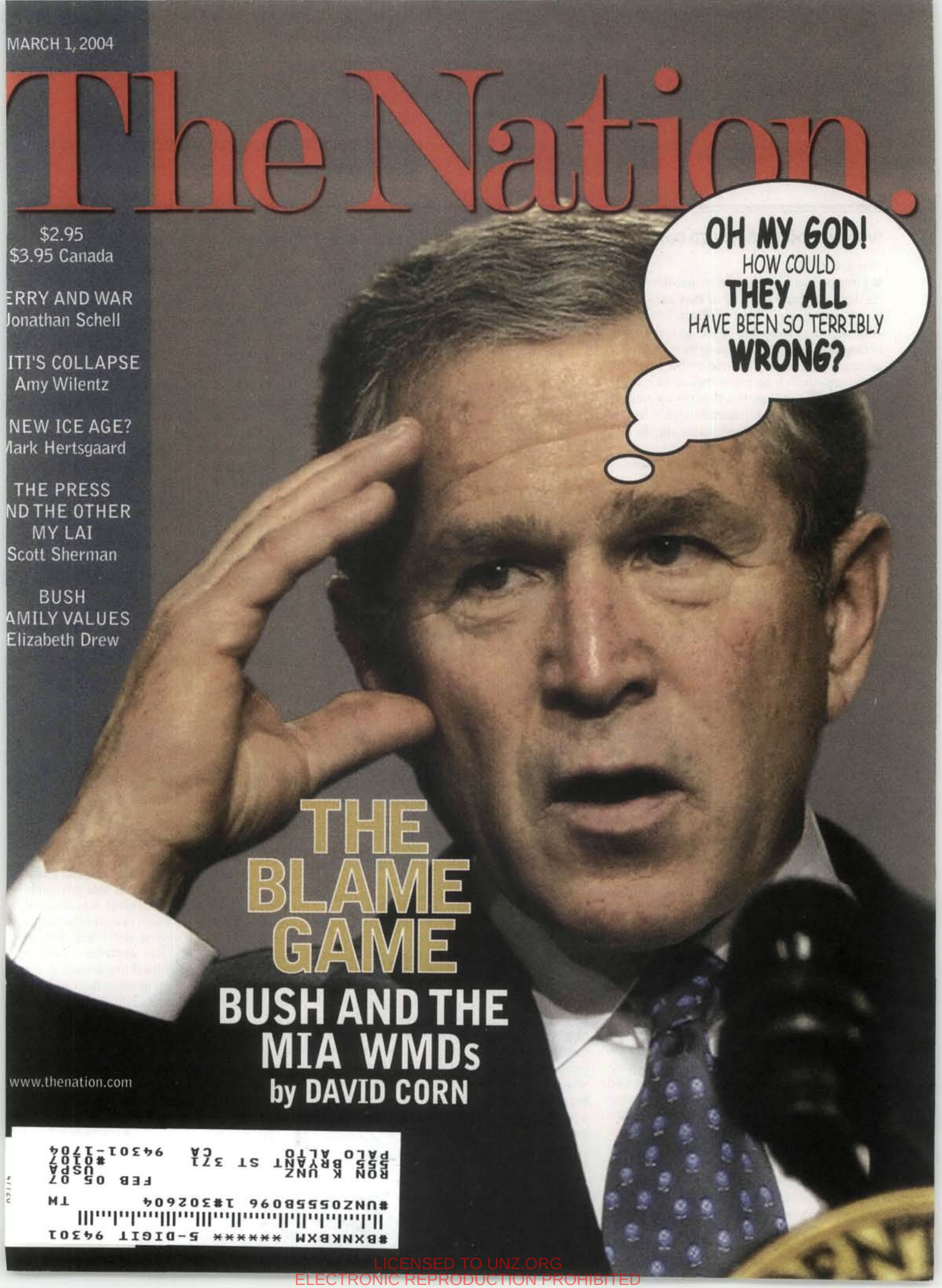

THE BLAME GAME

BUSH AND THE MIA WMDs

by DAVID CORN

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LETTERS

R.O. BLECHMAN

WHO WAS THAT BIG-HAIRED GUY?

Ann Arbor, Mich.

■ I was pleasantly surprised to discover Douglas Wolk's perceptive review of the Cure's career and latest release ["Men in Black," Feb. 16]. Although the captioning of the accompanying photograph might be taken as support for Wolk's assertion that nobody can remember what any of the non-Smith band members look like, many longtime fans will realize that the gentleman "seated center" is not Robert Smith but bassist Simon Gallup, and that Smith is the slightly less big-haired fellow seated on the right.

EWAN MACPHERSON

PUNCHES & JUDY

Buffalo, NY

■ Thank you, Katha Pollitt, for your refreshing take on Dr. Judith Steinberg ["Judy, Judy, Judy," Feb. 16]. Her treatment by the media and its pundits has been misleading, hypocritical and downright nasty. And as you made clear, these attacks and subtle snubs reveal more about the values of the pundits than the character of Howard Dean's wife. Judy was my high school classmate—bright, hard-working, generous, always ready with a smile. And, yes, she was shy, typically inconspicuous on the edge of the seating chart and never taken with self-promotion. Her quiet strength then, on her way to Princeton, appears to have grown in the three decades since. Rather than the nonsense she's encountered from the press, Dr. Steinberg—community doctor, mother and spouse in a stable and loving family, active volunteer—deserves our respect and admiration. PETER PITEGOFF

We're still being flooded with mail on this column, which says, actually or in effect, "Thank you, thank you, thank you for 'Judy, Judy, Judy.'" —The Editors

MURDER OR ASSASSINATION?

New York City

■ As a longtime admirer of Pier Paolo Pasolini's brilliant, idiosyncratic writings—so little known in the States—I was delighted to see the new Pasolini essay collection lauded by George Sciabba's review, "Lust for Life" [Feb. 9]. However, the bald statement that Pasolini "was murdered by a teenage boy he had picked up" should have been more nuanced. A great many serious people in Italy believe that Pasolini was assassinated in a plot that included elements of the neo-Fascist party, the MSI, and in which the state security services were, at the least, complicit. A great deal of the physical evidence at the crime scene flatly contradicted the "confession" of the alleged murderer, whose family had ties to MSI circles (even Enzo Siciliano's rather homophobic Pasolini biography, available in English, details many of these contradictions). And the youth's insistence that he killed because Pasolini had tried to sodomize him with a two-by-four struck those who knew Pasolini as absurd. Among those who believed there was a plot to kill Pasolini were Italo Calvino and his redoubtable wife (both deeply fond of Pasolini), as they recounted to me some years back when I took them on a night-crawl of Manhattan's gay discos. So did Oriana Fallaci, who wrote about it in the days when she was still an internationally respected journalist, long before she gave herself over to the racist diatribes of her dotage. My view is that the many questions surrounding Pasolini's murder make it an enigma that, at this late date, will probably never be resolved to anyone's satisfaction. DOUG IRELAND

MEDICAID MAY STILL FOOT THE BILL

New York City

■ Regarding Marc Siegel's "Coverage for No One" [Jan. 12/19]: His patient John Elias may be eligible to have some of the costs of his medicines covered by Medicaid even if his income exceeds Medicaid eligibility limits. As a New York City social worker, I became aware of the Surplus Income (or "spend-down") Program within Medicaid, which allows monthly income in excess of the allowed amount to be offset by medical bills. Thus, if the patient's income exceeds the allowed monthly income level, and if the monthly medical expenses exceed his "excess" income, he will be eligible for Medicaid each month after he has incurred medical expenses equal to his excess income. Medicaid will then cover the remainder of his medical expenses for the rest of the month. Perhaps Siegel can get the social service department in his hospital to look into Elias's eligibility for this program. ERICA SUCHER

PILL-PUSHERS TO THE PUBLIC

Mahomet, Ill.

■ The public would do well to take note of Richard DeGrandpre's "Trouble in Prozac Nation" [Jan. 5]: A few years ago, as a primary care physician practicing in student health, I became alarmed at the number of my clients who, in the healthiest period of their lives, had been prescribed SSRIs. The level of use of these agents reminded me of the 1970s, when the benzodiazepines (e.g., Valium) were the rage. I concluded that, now as then, if everybody needs to be on these medications, then hardly anyone should be on these medications. A review of the literature revealed that in addition to their unpleasant side effects and the increased suicide rates DeGrandpre discusses, there is little evidence that these medications are any better than a placebo for treating depression. Further, the biogenic amine theory of depression, used to rationalize the use of these agents, is just that—a theory. Despite decades of diligent research by many bright investigators, no biological markers for depression have been found.

Unfortunately, you likely won't hear that from a physician. I recently attended a presentation by a psychiatry faculty member on the treatment of depression—with SSRIs, of course. After the talk, I asked him about the fact that he did not mention the reports of increased suicide rates among those taking SSRIs.

"You know," he replied, "we didn't believe those data initially. Now we think there's probably something to it. The problem is, we just don't know what to do with that information." Indeed. The powerful pharmaceutical industry has effectively marginalized the SSRI skeptics. I look forward to the day when a patient can hear, "I am sorry you're so sad. There are some behavioral approaches we can take to help you cope better and gain happiness"—so much preferable to the all-too-common, "You have an abnormal brain. Here, take this pill." CHARLES G. YOUNG

R I P, MR. ALGER

Bath, Me.

■ Kudos to Paul Krugman for his "The Death of Horatio Alger" [Jan. 5]. I have a term to describe the Bushies, one I'd like to see in general use: Regressives. ARTHUR CANNON

Rochester, NY

■ Paul Krugman is no doubt right that the rich are getting richer and even the gifted poor are less able to join in the fun. But he's wrong on Horatio Alger. In those novels, luck and pluck were always required as well as true grit (dutiful hard work at bare survival wages); and even these were not enough to assure the hero's ascent to riches. He also needed a boss with an eligible daughter, and also whatever it takes to meet, woo and win her hand in marriage.

Economists don't tell us these days whether Boss's Daughter per capita ratios have risen or fallen, but given the consolidation of small and medium-sized businesses into big ones, I suspect it's fallen substantially since Alger's time. Even more reason to mourn the loss of the old days of greater—if never really equal and always fictional—opportunities available to those who have what it takes. RICHARD GOLLIN

Bethesda, Md.

■ What about women entering the work force in greater numbers and women earning college degrees in numbers greater than men? In Horatio

(Continued on Page 23)

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EDITORIALS

Bush's Credibility Gap

"There's going to be ample time for the American people to assess whether or not I made good calls," George W. Bush told *Meet the Press* host Tim Russert in their recent one-on-one. But if Bush has his way, he's not going to do anything to help the American people—or the global community—assess his credibility before he stands for re-election. The commission he has appointed to review the faulty prewar intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction will not report its findings until March 2005, months after the election. (There are other problems with the commission; it is co-chaired by federal Judge Laurence Silberman, a champion of right-wing activism, and so far it has few members with experience in intelligence matters.) This means there may well be no official body that issues a pre-election judgment on whether Bush and his aides dishonestly overstated Iraq's WMD threat to whip up public support for an elective war.

Bush's credibility has become an issue of late. He has not been able to explain his prewar assertions about Iraq's weapons (or, similarly, his phony budget projections designed to hide massive deficits). And that credibility gap undermines US security. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently noted that the missing WMDs have led to international skepticism concerning US intelligence, and that may make it harder for Washington—or the UN—to win support for necessary actions in the future. "The bar has been raised," Annan warned. "People are going to be very suspicious when we try to use intelligence to justify certain actions." Testifying in Congress, Margaret Tutwiler, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, said that America's image abroad has become so tarnished in recent years that "it will take us many years of hard, focused work" to refurbish it.

But Bush isn't engaging in that sort of hard work. He refuses to demand accountability at the CIA or to acknowledge, as David Corn notes on page 13, that he and his aides turned flawed intelligence into disinformation. Instead, even as new examples of falsifications come to light—the most recent being the White House acknowledgment that Bush's statement in his 2002 State of the Union address that "we have found" diagrams of US nuclear power plants and other facilities in Afghanistan had no basis in fact—he continues to hide behind disingenuous remarks. On *Meet the Press*, he said WMDs might have been hidden, destroyed or shipped out of the country. But David Kay, the recently resigned weapons hunter, concluded that Saddam had no significant WMD production programs and that there were no WMD stockpiles to be moved or demolished. Bush also insisted—yet again—that Saddam had been a "gathering threat." But if Iraq was not producing or amassing WMDs, what was so "gathering" about this "threat"? Kay noted that the UN inspections had done a good job of containing Saddam.

Bush says he has nothing to explain. Sure, he appointed a commission, but he claims its main task will be to examine intelligence on unconventional weapons worldwide. There is no assurance it will look at how Bush used—or abused—the intelligence.

Let's not politicize all this, Bush defenders cry. But what can be a more important issue in the 2004 election than whether the incumbent misled the nation into war? The WMD scandal illuminates what is most wrong with the Bush Administration: dishonesty, recklessness, arrogance and extremism. Between now and the election, the American people will decide whether they're willing to live with the dangerous consequences of his duplicity.

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COMMENT

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The 'Beat Bush' Brigades

ELECTION MATTERS

Percy Daley has seen a lot of politics in his eighty years, but he never saw anything like the crowd that showed up at the Belfast, Maine, city hall when Democrats gathered for their presidential caucus on February 8. "People were showing up in droves," said Daley, who as the convener of the local caucus is used to seeing about thirty Democrats, not the 150 who arrived to choose among John Kerry, Howard Dean and local favorite Dennis Kucinich. Daley shifted the caucus to the much larger municipal boathouse and, he says, "I don't think we lost anyone when we made the move. Everyone wanted to register their vote against Bush."

Belfast was not alone. Almost twice as many Democrats showed up this year in Maine as in 1992, when, Maine Democratic Party chair Dottie Melanson says, it appears the previous record was set. Twice as many people participated in Iowa's 2004 caucuses as turned up to decide between Al Gore and Bill Bradley in 2000, and the same was true for Arizona's primary. New Hampshire primary participation broke the previous record by 50,000 votes. "I've never seen this much interest in an election," exclaimed Art Link, former governor of North Dakota, where Democratic caucus-goers outnumbered Republicans 4 to 1.

"Democrats are more energized and angry than at any time since Lyndon Johnson's presidency," says Curtis Gans, of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate. While high primary and caucus participation does not guarantee that more Democrats will vote in November, Gans says it "probably translates into higher turnout and more Democrats at the polls" this fall. That prospect terrifies Republicans. The fight for the Democratic nomination, which Republicans had hoped would produce a battered challenger to the President, has instead confirmed Bush's vulnerability. Democratic candidates took some shots at one another, but voters generally tuned in to the chorus of criticism of Bush. And it resonated. As Iowa Democrats prepared to caucus in mid-January, Bush was still surfing the wave of approval that followed the capture of Saddam Hussein. By the time Democrats went to the polls in Tennessee and Virginia to give Kerry his eleventh and twelfth wins of fourteen contests so far, they were voting for a man polls showed to be leading Bush. Kerry, who won overwhelming victories in both states, claimed that "Americans are voting for change."

Evidence of the extent to which the Beat Bush mantra has energized and unified Democrats is particularly troubling to GOP strategists, who had hoped to use hot-button issues—the latest being gay marriage—to divide Democrats. Perhaps just as

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB: Who should progressives support in the Democratic primaries? Joel Rogers argues that John Edwards offers a real program of democratic renewal while Antonio Villaraigosa says we should throw our lot in with John Kerry. Read them both at www.thenation.com.

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troubling for the Bush team is the surprising level of anti-Bush sentiment among Republican primary voters. In New Hampshire, more than 20 percent of voters who took Republican ballots did not vote for Bush; more than 8,000 GOP primary voters wrote in Democratic contenders like Kerry. In conservative Oklahoma, 10 percent of Republican primary voters cast their ballots for Bill Wyatt, an unknown challenger to the President.

Republican National Committee chair Ed Gillespie has developed a nasty case of intensity envy; he's telling reporters GOP primary partisans really are as passionate as the Democrats. But that's just spin. Gillespie wants the Democratic fight—with its Tuesday-night victory parties and Wednesday-morning "Kerry Wins" headlines—to be over. Unfortunately, so does Democratic National Committee chair Terry McAuliffe. Instead of maintaining the best roadshow the party has had in years, McAuliffe wants to get on to fundraising for November. He's likely to get his wish. Wesley Clark has thrown in the towel, and it's difficult to see how John Edwards or Howard Dean can continue spinning weak second-place finishes into moral victories much longer.

The rush to finish is not entirely a matter of the party command forcing its will on the cadres. There's not much question that primary and caucus voters are thinking ahead to November. In Belfast, the caucus passed a resolution asking the United Nations to provide observers to assure that this year's election is not marred by bad ballots and bad counts like those Democrats believe cost them Florida, and the White House, in 2000. "The feeling was that, with all these people showing up so early in the year to oppose Bush, there is not going to be a problem turning out enough voters to beat him," explained Percy Daley. "We just want to make sure that, come November, they will all be counted."

JOHN NICHOLS

Spying on the Guild

On February 3 a law enforcement official working with the Joint Terrorism Task Force in Des Moines served a subpoena on Drake University seeking records on its student chapter of the National Lawyers Guild and on a conference the guild had sponsored in November titled "Stop the Occupation! Bring the Iowa Guard Home!" The subpoena sought the identities of the attendees at the conference and the officers of the chapter, meeting agenda, annual reports filed by the chapter and campus police reports on the conference. At the same time, prosecutors subpoenaed several conference participants to testify before a grand jury and obtained a court order barring Drake University from commenting on the subpoena.

When asked why it was investigating an antiwar conference and seeking records on a student group, the government initially said it could not comment, citing grand jury secrecy. After receiving substantial criticism, it reversed course and said it was investigating an incident during a rally that followed the conference, in which a demonstrator tried to climb a National Guard fence. On February 10, after an article appeared in the *New York Times*, the government backed down and withdrew the subpoenas. When asked why, it resurrected the grand jury secrecy excuse, saying it could not explain. The question remains: Even assuming someone did try to climb a fence, why did prosecutors institute a federal grand jury investigation and subpoena a student group's officers, meeting records and reports?

Given the government's swift cave, one might be tempted to dismiss this as an isolated incident of wayward prosecutors. But it's not. It's the foreseeable result of policies adopted at the highest levels of the Justice Department. In June 2002, Attorney General John Ashcroft issued guidelines permitting the FBI to attend public meetings of political and religious groups without any indication that a group was considering criminal activity. The FBI previously had to have some reasonable indication of criminal activity before it could employ such tactics—a restriction that stemmed from the abuses of the 1960s and '70s, when the bureau conducted massive political spying, infiltrated civil rights and antiwar groups and disrupted their lawful activities. In Ashcroft's view, the notion that the FBI should be limited to looking for crimes is too confining. But if investigations are not focused on federal crimes, what are they going to be focused on? The Drake University students' lawyers guild chapter?

The answer, apparently, is yes. In October 2003 the FBI issued a "terrorism" bulletin outlining the tactics of antiwar demonstrators, including such subversive activities as using the Internet to raise funds and organize and holding training camps to rehearse demonstration tactics. The bulletin directed law-enforcement agencies to "be alert to these possible indicators of protest activity and report any potentially illegal acts to the nearest FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force."

When Congress enacted the Patriot Act, it included a definition of "domestic terrorism" that critics said could conceivably apply to political demonstrations. Defenders of the government dismissed that charge as hysterical and overblown. But the proof is in the pudding. The Feds maintain the Drake case had nothing to do with the Patriot Act, but when the government institutes federal grand jury proceedings about a student antiwar conference and rally and seeks records on the meeting and its attendees, it suggests either that it doesn't have enough to do or that it sees monitoring of political dissent as an integral part of the "war on terrorism."

That a National Lawyers Guild chapter was the focus of the subpoena is all too fitting. In 1989 the FBI settled a lawsuit with the guild in which it admitted to spying on the group for some thirty-five years, including conducting warrantless wiretaps and secret "black bag job" searches of its national headquarters. The guild got this attention because in the 1950s it was one of the few organizations willing to defend the rights of accused Communists. (The ACLU at the time was busy purging itself of Communists—this time around the ACLU helped defend the subpoenaed activists.) Ever since, the guild has defended progressive political protesters, monitored the police during demonstrations and stood up for the right to dissent.

It is possible that the Drake University investigation is an aberration. But it fits all too comfortably within the guidance set forth by Ashcroft in his first Congressional testimony after 9/11. At that time, he warned that dissenters "erode our national unity and diminish our resolve. They give ammunition to America's enemies,

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COMMENT

and pause to America's friends." The Joint Terrorism Task Force was apparently listening. And it's listening still. DAVID COLE

David Cole, The Nation*'s legal affairs correspondent, is the author of* Enemy Aliens: Double Standards and Constitutional Freedoms in the War on Terrorism *(New Press).*

Haiti's Collapse

The Aristide administration, which has been overthrown once already, has been egalitarian in the lives destroyed during its time: Among its dead can be counted the president's former friends and his foes, democrats and supporters of dictatorship. Among the victims have been policemen and prisoners and politicians; rich men and poor, journalists and slum-dwellers, human-rights workers and doctors and businessmen. Almost no sector has been untouched.

No one can argue that Jean-Bertrand Aristide's presidency has been in any way successful other than this: It exists. He was elected in 1990 with enormous hope by an overwhelming majority in a legitimate election—and quickly overthrown by the Haitian Army and its friends. In 1994 he was returned to power through the good will of the Clinton Administration, in the optimistic expectation that he would be able to turn Haiti around. He was not able to do so for a combination of reasons, some political, some personal and most having to do with his inability to conduct a happy relationship either with the Bush Administration or with his own business and intellectual elite. Washington also cut off huge portions of aid, which cannot have helped Aristide's standing. Still, a fatal combination of arrogance and naïveté on his part made Aristide's difficult position much more intractable. Meanwhile, the Haitian opposition has been coddled and pushed toward the depths of intransigence by Aristide's detractors in the US government, in both Haiti and in Washington. By now, with the country well on its way to chaos, many argue that Aristide has exhausted the electorate's patience and must be replaced.

Yet now—as he finally begins to recognize how powerful the opposition has become despite all his political jockeying and playacting—should be the time for all friends of Haiti, especially in the US government, to support Aristide's continuation at the helm: not because he is good but because he is president. Aristide is a transitional figure and not the best of these. He is no Mandela, and he does not have the political maturity to control the violent forces that swirl through Haitian politics—no easy job. Yet the future of Haiti hinges on support for institutions and for a state based on law. As part of the unrest, a gang element managed to take over Gonaïves, one of Haiti's largest cities—a ramshackle affair of shantytowns and gingerbread houses atop salt flats and roads made undrivable by potholes, with few enough institutions as it is. This gang, which styles itself the Cannibal Army or, in its latest incarnation, the Artibonite Resistance Front (perhaps more palatable to the international community), has burned down the courthouse and the prison in Gonaïves, released the prison population and forced the mayor to flee. Though there may be elaborate and in some cases good excuses for these actions, taken as a trend they do not bode well for the rule of law. In the wake of the Gonaïves takeover, ten lesser cities have fallen to such forces, each in differing circumstances but all motivated by encouragement from sectors of the opposition and by the sense that Aristide is about to fall. That will not be helped by State Department spokesman Richard Boucher's hints on February 9 that a solution to the situation might not necessarily include President Aristide. Three of the towns have been retaken by the government.

The numbers of Aristide's detractors, their unwillingness to stop their protests even in the face of police brutality and killings and their takeover of Gonaïves and other towns have brought a new humility to Aristide, which sits rather uncomfortably on his proud shoulders. Still, the situation has been volatile enough to force him to make necessary concessions, under pressure from the Organization of American States and Caribbean Community, to the opposition. Because the opposition is swollen with self-importance in the wake of so many bloody victories in the countryside, it may not respond to Aristide's eleventh-hour overtures. It was not moved by a huge outpouring of support for him in the streets of Port-au-Prince on the recent anniversary of the fall of Duvalier.

It may be too late for Aristide. Rarely has a leader failed so grossly to rise to a historic occasion. When he returned to power, he bravely disbanded the Haitian Army and then promptly permitted a kind of mass civilian militarization without insuring his continuing control over it. A remnant of the old army is supporting and perhaps leading the current chaos. But in hundreds, perhaps thousands, of instances, it is Aristide's own toughs who have turned against him. Someone has convinced them that he no longer represents Haiti's future; no doubt someone with money. In a country as poor as Haiti, the man with more money to spend will win in the end (as in the *favelas* of Brazil and the slums of Colombia), because it is so very hard to maintain the high moral ground when no one's paying you to do it and the kids are starving back in the village or your one-room shack.

And the miserable street—with its thugs and its slum-dwellers,

CALVIN TRILLIN

SADDAM AS A GATHERING THREAT

So the weapons weren't there—so what, Bush says,
Saddam was a "gathering threat."
We were certainly right to start a war.
This threat simply had to be met.

A gathering threat can't be ignored,
So that's why we gave him a lathering.
Except if the weapons weren't there at all,
One wonders just what he was gathering.

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with its students and bricklayers and flat-tire fixers and car-wash boys, with its orphans and preachers and market ladies and tap-tap drivers, with its cart-pullers and trough-cleaners, its seamstresses and tailors, its cock-fighters and garbage-pickers, numbers-runners, whores and money-changers—is Haiti's political steam-roller. The gods must help the Haitian politician the street has finally turned against—nothing else will. It will be interesting to see who will reward the "resistance" for its courage, and how. If Aristide must fall, let us hope still for real, meaningful elections in Haiti, soon. But let us not expect them. AMY WILENTZ

Amy Wilentz is the author of The Rainy Season: Haiti Since Duvalier *(Touchstone) and of the novel* Martyrs' Crossing *(Ballantine).*

Iran's Tainted Elections

Iran's elections, scheduled for February 20, have provoked the gravest political crisis in that country in twenty years. The conservative, clerical Guardian Council sparked the turmoil in January by barring nearly half of the roughly 8,000 candidates for various national and local posts from running. A majority of those excluded were from the reformist camp associated with President Mohammad Khatami, including eighty-three sitting members of Parliament. Outraged members staged a sit-in, and when that failed, about a third of them resigned.

Khatami, famed for refusing to confront the hard-liners, at first pleaded with Supreme Jurisprudent Ali Khamenei to intervene. Only a few hundred reformists were reinstated, however. At first Khatami seemed prepared to postpone the elections, but when Khamenei denounced this plan, Khatami folded. It may not matter. Some observers felt that the reformists were likely to do poorly even had they not been barred. In last year's Tehran election, turnout was low because the bright hopes of the late 1990s for significant cultural and social change have faded. Conservative candidates were returned by a handful of voters.

Khatami and his team are determined to work within the system. The party closest to him has even refused to join a boycott of the elections. Many in his generation were scarred by the violent struggles of 1978–83, in which thousands died. For this reason, they refuse to go to the streets or to provoke a decisive split in the ruling class. Their weapons so far have been speeches, appeals, sit-ins, resignations and the occasional hunger strike. That these can be effective in Iran's "moral economy" was implicitly recognized when hard-liners threatened those who resigned with prosecution.

Khatami has backed away from his earlier devotion to "civil society." He now speaks of "communal society." Stability and national unity are more important, in other words, than openness (although he has called election restrictions "a threat to the nation"). This timidity has provoked a rift with the more militant student movements, which mounted protests last summer that were put down with some violence. Khatami did nothing.

The office of the Supreme Jurisprudent is the most important branch of Iran's theocratic government, and it dominates all the others. Khatami is supported in Parliament by reformists of the Second of Khordad Front, who won 189 of the 290 seats in 2000. More than 100 of the reform Parliament's laws, however, were struck down by Khamenei's Guardian Council, and many newspapers have also been closed. Reformists who questioned the absolute powers of Khamenei have been jailed. Reformists allege that the exclusion of so many of their candidates is a parliamentary coup plotted by conservatives two years ago.

The Second of Khordad and its close allies favor economic liberalization and privatization, as well as increased personal freedoms, including those of women, and have criticized the corruption and arbitrary power of the ruling clerics. But the front has been unable to implement policies that would address the country's high unemployment rate or the high poverty rate (40 percent). Reformers have been unable to improve the lot of most Iranians, either because they have been blocked by conservative clerics or because they do not make bread-and-butter issues their top priority. Iran's workers, for instance, lack the right to strike or to form independent unions. In late January, when copper workers in southeastern Iran went on strike, the government sent in SWAT teams that simply shot down four of them and wounded many others. Nearly a third of Iranians work in agriculture, and a quarter in industry, and the reformists have done little for any of them.

The clerical conservatives who are likely to dominate Parliament will suffer from profound illegitimacy, both because of the unfairness of the election and because turnout will almost certainly be small. Over the next four years, they will be held accountable for the economy. They may come to regret their parliamentary coup. For the hard-liners to try to rule an increasingly young, restive, urban population without a popular mandate could well set the country up for substantial unrest. After all, the younger activists, the ones who demonstrated last summer, do not remember the Great Terror of 1981–83.

In the meantime, the Bush Administration should accommodate demands in neighboring Iraq that upcoming elections there be as open and direct as humanly possible. If Iraq's Shiites demonstrably benefit from free and fair elections, they will present a devastating practical critique of the Iranian system. That success will do more to undermine theocratic dictatorship than anything the United States could hope to accomplish through more direct intervention in Tehran's affairs. JUAN COLE

Juan Cole (www.juancole.com), professor of modern Middle Eastern and South Asian history at the University of Michigan, is the author, most recently, of Sacred Space and Holy War *(I.B. Tauris).*

A New Ice Age?

George W. Bush may not know it, but one influential part of his government is finally taking global climate change seriously. An extraordinary new report by an elite Pentagon planning unit has declared that climate change is a national security threat of the greatest urgency and demands an immediate response.

Directly contradicting Bush and other right-wingers, the Pentagon report maintains that climate change is not only real, it

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could strike sooner and with much deadlier effect than is usually thought. By 2020, when babies born today will be in high school, climate change could unleash a series of interlocking catastrophes including mega-droughts, mass starvation and nuclear war, as countries like China, India and Pakistan battle over river valleys and other sources of scarce food and water. If the climate's tipping point is reached, change could come abruptly, within a span of three to five years, and ironically result in another ice age. A frozen northern Europe would become all but uninhabitable. The American Midwest would be rendered a dust bowl. Southern California would go thirsty. The risk of such outcomes is uncertain and "quite possibly small," the Pentagon report notes before adding,"but given the dire consequences, it should be elevated beyond a scientific debate. Action now matters."

Bush and his allies in the fossil-fuel and auto industries will find these conclusions hard to accept but also hard to ignore. The naysayers' usual defense—that climate change is more a theory *favored by liberals than a reality proven by data—won't work* against Andrew Marshall, the brain behind the Pentagon report. At 83, Marshall is a legendary figure who has done "big picture" strategic planning for the military for decades and been a trusted associate of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld since the 1970s, when the two men were among the earliest advocates of missile defense, the right wing's holy grail.

It's not known whether Rumsfeld has read the climate change report, but either Marshall or someone close to him made sure it didn't get buried: A copy of the unclassified study was given to *Fortune*, which published a measured yet terrifying summary in its February 9 issue. Placing the report in such a respected, widely read business publication may have been Marshall's way to do an end run around the White House and send a message to US business leaders: Wake up to climate change's dangers and work to shift civilization's course.

One immediate effect may involve the World Bank, whose board of directors is expected to vote by April 15 on a controversial recommendation to stop all funding of coal and oil development, the two fuels most responsible for the carbon dioxide emissions that propel climate change. The vote poses a dilemma for World Bank president James Wolfensohn, for the recommendation comes from an advisory commission he himself appointed to show that the bank was open to input from civil society.

The so-called Extractive Industries Review commission was chaired by Emil Salim, a former environment minister of Indonesia and former board member of a coal company, and it featured representatives of industry, labor unions, Third World governments, nongovernmental organizations and indigenous peoples. Citing the dangers of climate change and the often punishing human rights and pollution effects on local people, the review urged that the bank halt all coal loans immediately and all oil loans by 2008. It also recommended that the bank increase renewable energy loans by 20 percent a year and grant local peoples the right to veto projects they don't want.

These changes would amount to a virtual revolution in the World Bank's operations, so it's not surprising that bank management has resisted them. "The bank has been one of the world's leading public investors in climate change," says Daphne

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Wysham, a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC, who monitored the Extractive Industries Review. Wysham notes that the World Bank's energy lending is lopsidedly biased, with 94 percent of total funds underwriting fossil-fuel projects and only 6 percent supporting renewables like wind and solar.

According to a draft response, World Bank management wants the board to reject nearly all the commission's reforms. Rather than halt coal and oil loans, management urges $300 million to $500 million a year in new funding. Fossil fuels, reasons the draft, are the cheapest energy available and thus promise to speed Third World countries' ascent from poverty.

But the Pentagon report makes it harder for defenders of the status quo to sustain such arguments. What good is it to ascend from poverty into a world descending into weather chaos and social breakdown? Such reasoning is unlikely to sway George W. Bush; progress in the United States will have to wait until after he is replaced as President. But at the World Bank, the board of directors will soon make a fateful decision: Either back management's call for more coal and oil or lead the way to a post-carbon future. If board members take the trouble to read the Pentagon's warnings in *Fortune*, it's hard to see how they could vote the wrong way.

MARK HERTSGAARD

Mark Hertsgaard, The Nation's environment correspondent, is the author, most recently, of The Eagle's Shadow: Why America Fascinates and Infuriates the World *(Farrar, Straus & Giroux).*

The Other My Lai

In July 2002 a retired US Army colonel who would be dead within months unburdened himself of twenty-two classified documents concerning war crimes in Vietnam. The colonel didn't care for journalists, but he was fond of his neighbor in Springfield, Virginia, a Washington-based science reporter for the Toledo *Blade*. Those twenty-two documents laid the groundwork for a remarkable four-part series published in the *Blade* this past October—a series that meticulously reconstructed the activities of an elite US Army reconnaissance platoon and its descent into barbarism at the height of the Vietnam War.

The time was May to November 1967; the place was a highly contested region of Quang Ngai province in South Vietnam—less than twenty miles from My Lai, which would be devastated by American soldiers a few months later. The unit was known as Tiger Force, and its mandate was to annihilate Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces, insure that civilians were safely herded into "strategic hamlets" and—as the unit's slogan declared—to "out-guerrilla the guerrillas." Enraged by prolonged exposure to sniper fire, booby traps and high casualties, Tiger Force unleashed a reign of terror that left possibly hundreds of civilians dead. Because of its dispassionate tone and sturdy documentation—and because it was sponsored by an independently owned, financially troubled news organization—the *Blade* series bears a striking resemblance to Seymour Hersh's My Lai exposé, which was originally syndicated by the Dispatch News Service in 1969 (and later expanded into a book, *My Lai 4*). According to the *Blade*, elderly farmers were gunned down in rice paddies, grenades were hurled into civilian bunkers and prisoners were scalped and beaten to death with shovels. Ears were severed from the corpses of dead Vietnamese, and, with the help of shoelaces, transformed into ghoulish necklaces. "There was a period," the *Blade* reported, quoting a platoon medic, "when just about everyone had a necklace of ears." In the early 1970s the Pentagon, following a four-year investigation, determined that eighteen members of Tiger Force had committed war crimes, but none of the soldiers were ever prosecuted.

Despite its explosive findings, the *Blade* series—which was assembled from candid interviews with Tiger Force veterans and Vietnamese civilians, along with documents from the National Archives—was not a front-page story in leading American newspapers, most of which printed truncated summaries published by the Associated Press and Scripps Howard. (Only the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, the Arizona *Daily Star* and a handful of others deemed the wire stories worthy of page 1.) National television greeted the series with silence. Hersh, writing in the November 10 *New Yorker*, lamented that this "extraordinary investigation...remains all but invisible." Prodded by Hersh, ABC jumped on the story with two fine segments by Peter Jennings and Ted Koppel, but for the most part the silence continued. The list of major news organizations that have yet to acknowledge the *Blade* series includes NBC, CBS, CNN, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Readers of the *New York Times* waited eight weeks to hear about the *Blade* investigation, at which point they encountered, on page A24, a meandering article by John Kifner—a piece that confirmed the essential facts of the *Blade* investigation but failed to convey the depth and emotional power of the series itself. "The Kifner piece," says Michael Sallah, who co-wrote the *Blade* series with Mitch Weiss, "was their way of kissing it off. I expected more original reporting from the *Times*." (*Times* public editor Daniel Okrent, noting that his newspaper had "diminished" and "devalued" the *Blade* series, sought an explanation from editor Bill Keller. "Keller told me," Okrent wrote on February 1, "that if his own staff had developed the *Blade* series, he would have put it on the front page.")

No mention of the *Blade* series appeared on the *Times* editorial page, a fact that was true for almost every other American newspaper as well. For passion, clarity and good sense, one had to turn to the editorial page of the Bangor, Maine, *Daily News*, a 65,000-circulation newspaper, which wrote, "The newly disclosed series of atrocities cries out for further investigation—not to punish the G.I.s but to fix blame and punish the superior officers who sent those soldiers on such bloody missions and have covered up the atrocities and their own complicity ever since." Declared an Austin *American-Statesman* editorial, "The army now must come clean about what happened and release all available reports, files and information." It says much about the timidity of our press that newspapers in Bangor and Austin—and not the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* or *Los Angeles Times*—

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JONATHAN SCHELL

Kerry and War

John Kerry has been twice a hero. First, as a soldier in Vietnam, he displayed extraordinary physical courage, winning the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and three Purple Hearts. Once, injured and under heavy fire, he turned back his river boat to rescue a wounded comrade, who now credits Kerry with saving his life. Second, displaying civil courage at home equal to his physical courage in battle, he embarked on a campaign of protest against the war in which he had fought, becoming a spokesperson for Vietnam Veterans Against the War. In 1971, the VVAW camped out on the Mall in Washington. President Nixon's Justice Department then sought and obtained a court injunction forbidding the groups from using the Mall. Immediately and spontaneously, the veterans, as if re-enacting the American Revolution, assembled in caucuses by state to deliberate and vote—and so created, at the symbolic center of the Republic, a kind of instant, ideal mini-republic of their own. They decided to defy the injunction and appeal their case to the Supreme Court, which reversed the lower court decision and permitted the protest to continue.

Kerry's subsequent words in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 23, 1971, still have the power to startle, in our time of general disorientation and muted speech, with their brave candor. He described the wrong done to the Vietnam veterans but did not fail also to discuss the wrongs they had committed. "I would like," he said, "to talk on behalf of all those veterans and say that several months ago in Detroit we had an investigation at which over 150 honorably discharged, and many very highly decorated, veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia. These were not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command.... They told stories that at times they had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in a fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country." He added, "We call this investigation the Winter Soldier Investigation"—invoking Thomas Paine's description of the soldiers at Valley Forge. And he said, referring to the policy that had led to these crimes, "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"

More than two decades later, Kerry made a decision that in the view of many observers failed to demonstrate the heroism of these earlier actions: On October 11, 2002, he voted, as did every other Democratic legislator with presidential ambitions but one—Representative Dennis Kucinich—to license George W. Bush to go to war against Iraq if he saw fit. Yet soon after the vote it turned out that the temper of the Democratic primary voters was antiwar, even angrily so, and Governor Howard Dean, who had opposed the war from the beginning, began his climb in the polls and became the generally acknowledged front-runner for the Democratic nomination. Kerry, previously considered the front-runner by many in the press, appeared to watch his longstanding presidential ambitions go down the drain. But then, in the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary, came the remarkable reversal of fortune in which Democratic voters, inspired by an almost palpable resolve to defeat Bush in the fall, switched their allegiance from the fiery Dean to the more phlegmatic and "electable" war hero Kerry, who soon won his long string of primary victories. In a peculiar act of political transplantation, the voters, energized by Dean, seemed by this switch to want to infuse the spirit of Dean into the body of Kerry, who then, Lazarus-like, came to life both as a person and as a candidate.

Left pending in all this maneuvering by ordinary citizens, however, was the question of Kerry's position on the war. Had our warrior-protester, now in pursuit of the presidency, sacrificed principle for ambition by voting for the Iraq war? Had the winter soldier abandoned his post? Had he by his vote asked American soldiers to die for a mistake? Only the Searcher of Hearts can know for sure. Kerry himself asserts that his vote to enable the war was a vote of conscience. What the rest of us can see, however, is that ever since his vote he has trapped himself in a morass—a little quagmire in its own right—of self-contradictory, equivocating, evasive, incomplete, unconvincing explanations of his stand.

Kerry has often said his position has been consistent, and this is true in the sense that he has said the same thing over and over. But it is in part precisely in this rigidity that the problem lies. Kerry voted for the war, he said at the time, because he believed that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and must be disarmed. He favored "regime change" but did not regard it as a justification for war. He rejected the allegation of Iraqi ties with Al Qaeda as unproven. "Let me be clear," he said in his Senate speech announcing his vote for the war resolution. "The vote I will give the President is for one reason and one reason only: to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, if we cannot accomplish that objective through new, tough weapons inspections in joint concert with our allies." He lengthily detailed the intelligence findings he had seen, concluding, "These weapons represent an unacceptable threat." Disturbingly, he did not address the constitutional problem raised by the fact that, as his Massachusetts colleague Ted Kennedy said, "The most solemn responsibility any Congress has is the responsibility given the Congress by the Constitution to declare war." Therefore, "we would violate that responsibility if we delegate that responsibility to the President in advance before the President himself has decided the time has come for war."

The measure was the only substantive one that Kerry or any senator would pass before the war, yet Kerry claimed to believe that his vote was conditioned on fulfillment of "promises" that the Administration had made. The promises were to exhaust all diplomatic possibilities before going to war and thereby to assemble a large international coalition to fight the war and help

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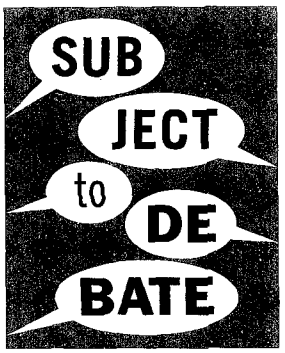
KATHA POLLITT

Kristof to the Rescue?



This morning I got an e-mail from Feminist Majority asking me to e-mail the President protesting the Iraqi Governing Council's approval of Resolution 137, which would abolish current family law and allow Sharia to take its place. This depressing development has not been widely reported, but I already knew about it thanks to Madre, the women's international human rights organization. No sooner had I dispatched my message than up popped Amnesty International, alerting me to the work being done to end sexual violence around the world by V-Day, Eve Ensler's feminist activist organization. Then it was Madre again, with news of an Islamic fundamentalist death threat against Iraqi feminist Yanar Mohammed. My snail mailbox is the same story: news and appeals from Equality Now, which uses letter-writing campaigns and legal action to combat injustices around the world, from female genital mutilation and honor killings to the imprisonment of Nepalese women who've had abortions; the Global Fund for Women, which sponsors a wide variety of pro-woman projects in 160 countries; Network of East/West Women, which supports women's rights activists in the former Soviet bloc; the women's desks of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch; and many more.

I'm reminded of these good people because the *New York Times*'s Nicholas Kristof is once again accusing American feminists of ignoring Third World women and girls. Last spring, he discovered obstetric fistula in Africa—the tear between the birth canal and the lower intestine that can happen during protracted labor and that, unless corrected, condemns a woman to a lifetime of physical misery and social ostracism. Kristof profiled Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia and wondered why "most feminist organizations in the West have never shown interest in these women." Perhaps, he wrote, "the issue doesn't galvanize women's groups because fistulas relate to a traditional child-bearing role." Right, we all know that feminists only care about aborting babies, not delivering them safely. The *Times* got a lot of letters (and published some, including one from me) pointing out that feminists, in fact, were behind numerous efforts to combat fistula and other maternity-related health problems in Africa, including the work of the UNFPA, praised by Kristof, whose funding was eliminated by the White House to please its right-wing Christian base.

You'd think he'd learn. But no. Now Kristof is complaining that American women's groups such as NOW and Feminist Majority don't care about sexual slavery and the trafficking of women and children for commercial sex. In a series of columns, he describes his efforts to "buy the freedom" of two Cambodian teenage prostitutes living in a sleazy brothel in Poipet and to get them home to their families. Evangelical Christians, he argues, care about girls like these; feminists are too busy "saving Title IX and electing more women to the Senate," he observed in a *Times* online forum. Right, why should American women care about equal opportunities and electing to office people who think contraception is as important as Viagra? Never mind that putting more *feminists* in the Senate—not more "women"—would mean more help for the very causes Kristof supports!

To tell you the truth, I thought those columns were a little weird—there's such a long tradition of privileged men rescuing individual prostitutes as a kind of whirlwind adventure. You would never know from the five columns he wrote about young Srey Neth and Srey Mom, that anyone in Cambodia thought selling your daughter to a brothel was anything but wonderful. I wish he had given us the voices of some Cambodian activists—for starters, the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center and the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)—both of which are skeptical about brothel raids and rescues, which often dump traumatized girls on local NGOs that lack the resources to care for them. Instead he called Donna Hughes—a professor at Rhode Island University who publishes in *National Review*, *The Weekly Standard* and *FrontPage Magazine*, and whose opposition to all forms of prostitution is so monolithic that she has written against the Thai government's policy of promoting and enforcing condom use in brothels to prevent transmission of AIDS—and gave her space to ventilate against American feminists.

Just for fun, I called Kim Gandy, head of NOW, something Kristof forgot to do. "We're basically a national organization with a domestic agenda," she told me. "I mean, that's what our mission is. If we had more money, we could do a lot more." Still, NOW had, along with Equality Now, Feminist Majority and other groups, lobbied for passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, passed in 2000 under President Clinton, which established legal rights for trafficking victims in the United States and mandated cuts in aid to governments involved in the sex trade. Over at Feminist Majority, Ellie Smeal was peeved as well. They'd spent hours, she told me, informing Kristof's assistant about their organization's work on sex trafficking—beyond lobbying for the trafficking bill, the Feminist Majority's Center for Women and Policing holds regular conferences on implementation for law-enforcement officials. "You could say that on every issue, we could do more," she said. "But 'complacent?' 'Shamefully lackadaisical?' I don't think that's fair." Jessica Neuwirth and Taina Bien-Aimé of Equality Now also met with Kristof, to little avail. "It's great that he brought the issue to greater public attention, and we hope he'll stay with it," Neuwirth said. "But I don't think he appreciates how stretched women's organizations are."

You can see the narrative in the process of creation: Third World women are victims; American men are saviors. Right-wing Christians care about Third World women; feminists only care about themselves. Meanwhile, Equality Now fights the good fight on 'spit and a nickel,' as Bien-Aimé says, and gets ignored.

As my daughter used to say when she was small, "What do you have to do to get some attention around here?" You can send a donation to Equality Now at PO Box 20646, Columbus Circle Station, New York, NY 10023; www.equalitynow.org. ■

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ERIC ALTERMAN

Al, We Hardly Know Ye

The evolution of the character invented by the media to play the role "Al Gore" will one day make a remarkable doctoral dissertation. The most doctrinaire postmodernist would have a hard time keeping up with the myriad literary inventions, textual subversions and convenient fictions necessary to sustain the ever-changing narrative. One day Gore is an uptight, hypercautious "serial exaggerator." Later, when it turns out that it was the media—most egregiously, the *Washington Post*'s Ceci Connolly—who spread false stories about Gore that were picked up and trumpeted on cable TV and talk-radio, he is recast as a radical wild man, sporting a frightening beard and spouting dangerous left-wing nostrums.

In a *New York Times* story titled "An Endorsement From Gore Became a Dubious Prize," Elisabeth Bumiller gives us the newest version, asking, "Is an endorsement from Al Gore the kiss of political death?" She cites observations made by Bob Dole on *Larry King Live* along with an anonymous "friend" of Gore. The story line is now set in stone: The Dean endorsement proved the final dot in the ideological rebranding of Al Gore from centrist Democrat to left-wing Democrat. You can almost hear the tongues clucking at Ben and Sally's.

I've got a bias here. I never liked Gore when I was beating up Naderites who thought it'd be fun to throw the election to George W. Bush. I had heard he could be charming in private—funny, self-effacing and intellectually inquisitive—but I never knew anyone who claimed to have personally seen this. And the fact that the only one outside his immediate family who seemed passionate about his presidential candidacy was Marty Peretz didn't help.

But in the past year I've watched Gore, freed from the burden of office-holding, finally finding the authentic voice that appeared to elude him for much of his political career. It began with his brave and early denunciations of the Bush Administration's war-planning, picked up steam with his attacks on its deceptions that enabled the war effort and manifested itself again with a recent speech on its AWOL attitude on global warming. Gore summed it all up over the weekend of February 5–7 in a speech at a New School University conference on "Uses and Misuses of Fear" in our political system, sponsored by the journal *Social Research*, and at a rally of Tennessee Democrats in Nashville, where he was joined by Wes Clark and John Edwards. He gave roughly the same speech to the rednecks and the pointy-heads.

At the New School conference, I was amazed at Gore's courage in calling the President to task for his (undeniable) manipulation of Americans' fear of terrorism and also at Gore's willingness to apply the same unflinching analysis to Bush's economic policies, environmental policies and abuse of civil liberties. And he didn't stop there. Gore took the further step to ask, systemically, just what was allowing these egregious abuses of power and trust to take place: "How could our precious nation have become so uncharacteristically vulnerable to such an effective use of fear to manipulate our politics?" His response:

> What happened? For one thing there's been a dramatic change in the nature of what the philosopher Jürgen Habermas has described as the structure of the public forum—the way our political discourse takes place. It no longer operates as it once did. It is simply no longer as accessible to the vigorous and free exchange of ideas from individuals in the way those ideas were freely and vigorously exchanged during the period of our founding.

Leaving aside the question of whether any nominee for President of the United States has ever before seen fit to quote a Frankfurt School philosopher, these are brave words for any mainstream politician. With nothing to gain and much to lose should he want to continue his career in public life someday, Gore is taking on the entire media structure that makes it so difficult for his increasingly complex critique of the Administration's policies to be heard. It's not only their fault for lying to us; it's everybody's fault for letting them get away with it.

Gore's presentation was impressive on many levels. He had clearly read a number of the papers to be given later at the conference and spoke perceptively about the physiological effects of fear on the cognitive processes and the ease with which these can be manipulated by advertisers and politicians alike. He admitted his own (relative) ignorance about many of the topics about which he had been reading but still managed to weave them into a coherent critique not only of how awful the Bush Administration is but how attenuated the muscles of our democratic body politic have grown, allowing Bush to get away with so much.

It is hardly any wonder that mainstream media mavens would react negatively to Gore's newfound self-confidence coupled with his uncompromised criticism of their willful self-delusion about the current Administration, the war and so much else. Even New School president (and Gore's former Senate colleague) Bob Kerrey didn't seem to get it, when he tried, after Gore's talk, to equate Democrats' manipulation of Republican untrustworthiness on Medicare and Social Security with Bush & Co.'s deliberate use of deception to fool Americans into an unnecessary, counterproductive war.

At the post-speech dinner, Gore took questions and demonstrated that self-effacing charm and penetrating intelligence I had heard about, admitting that he'd try to "bullshit" his way through the "essay question" I asked him and later demonstrating the technique he developed during his teenage years for hypnotizing chickens. His combination of brains and bravery—even in the face of his grave miscalculation regarding Dean—when viewed against the smug, shallow self-satisfaction of the media bigfeet who mock him, redounds enormously to Gore's benefit. When you compare him to the current occupant of the Oval Office and consider the nefarious manner by which he got there, it is more than enough to inspire despair about the state of our country, its unhappy immediate past and its profoundly frightening future. ■

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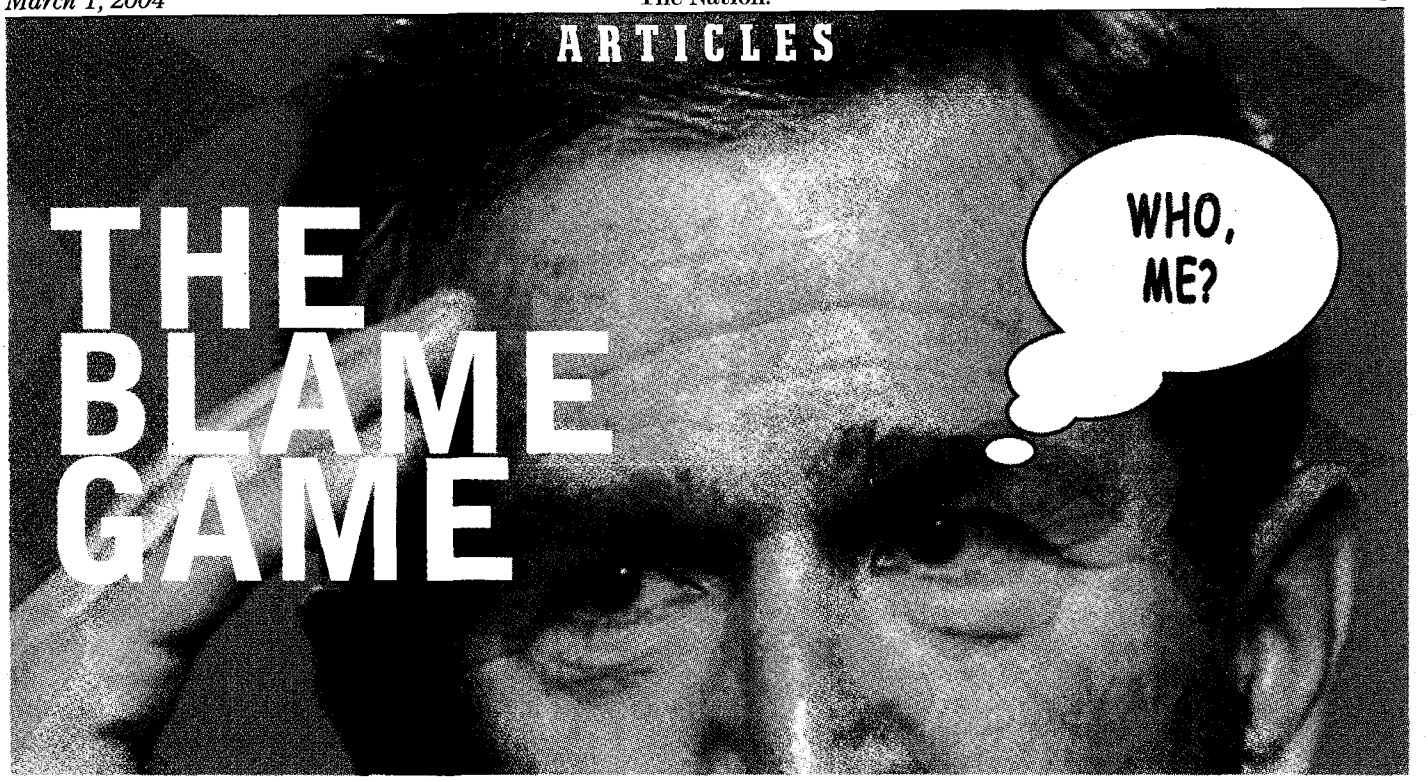
ARTICLES

THE BLAME GAME



by DAVID CORN

"We were all wrong."

David Kay, the recently resigned chief WMD hunter who has declared that it is unlikely Iraq had any weapons of mass destruction in the years before the war, uttered these words while testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee on January 28. They were meant to explain the tremendous gap between the prewar claims that Iraq was loaded with weapons of mass destruction and the reality that Kay says he found: no actual weapons and "no indication of a production process that would have produced [WMD] stockpiles." Embarrassed by Kay's disclosures, defenders of the invasion of Iraq have wrapped themselves in his we-were-all-wrong pronouncement. President Bush has said, "We all thought [WMDs] were there." White House press secretary Scott McClellan—who as of this writing has not been able to say the word "wrong"—has repeatedly maintained that "our intelligence was based on views shared by intelligence agencies around the world and the United Nations." It's a variant of Kay's we-all-blew-it explanation. The intent is clear: If everyone was wrong about the WMDs, then no one—especially not Bush—is to blame now.

But Kay was incorrect. Not everybody was mistaken on the question of Iraq's WMDs. Not UN inspectors, including Hans Blix, who worried about Saddam Hussein's WMD capabilities but questioned whether discrepancies in Iraq's accounting meant stockpiles existed. Not US intelligence analysts who argued that critical pieces of evidence were not solid. And there were many nongovernment experts who disputed the Bush Administration's WMD allegations. It was Bush, Dick Cheney, Colin Powell and other aides who missed the mark. Bush, in response to mounting pressure, has created a commission to study the prewar intelligence, but there is already a record supporting the serious charge that he and his colleagues made assertions before the invasion that were not supported by the intelligence they possessed.

Administration officials and other war backers have pointed to an October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate to justify their prewar statements about Iraq's unconventional weapons. An NIE is supposed to be the summation of the intelligence community's best information on a subject, and this one did say, "Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons." This assessment, it seems at the moment, was a historic failure, and it remains to be determined if it was the result of good-faith errors or political pressure and manipulation. But even this NIE—which included qualifiers and acknowledged serious disagreements within the intelligence community—did not contain evidence to support the more dramatic allegations that Bush put forward. A review of the declassified "key judgments" of the NIE and other pieces of intelligence—including a speech Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet gave at Georgetown University on February 5 to defend his agency—clearly shows that Bush and his national security team overstated what now appears to have been overstated intelligence.

In an October 7, 2002, speech in Cincinnati, Bush said Iraq had a "massive stockpile of biological weapons." The NIE said no such thing. It did report—apparently errantly—that Iraq had an extensive bioweapons program. But the available intelligence did not confirm the existence of a stockpile. As Tenet noted, "We said we had no specific information on the types or quantities of [biological] weapons, agent, or stockpiles at Baghdad's disposal." So how could Bush have said Iraq had stockpiled biological weapons? Bush suggested his claim was based on the previous findings of UN inspectors. But the UN inspections team, which left Iraq in 1998, had not concluded that a stockpile remained. In fact, Rolf Ekeus, who headed the UN inspections effort, had deduced the opposite. In a 2000 interview, he said, "There are no large quantities of weapons [in Iraq]. I don't think Iraq is especially eager in the biological and chemical area to produce

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such weapons for storage.... Rather, Iraq has been aiming to keep the capability to start up production immediately should it need to."

Tenet's speech also contradicted Cheney, who has echoed his boss and hyped evidence. Last May Bush declared, "We found the weapons of mass destruction." He was referring to two tractor-trailers discovered in northern Iraq during the war that the CIA initially maintained were mobile bioweapons labs. But Bush spoke too soon. Engineering experts at the Defense Intelligence Agency and experts outside government concluded that these trailers had been manufactured for other purposes, perhaps the production of hydrogen. Ignoring the well-known controversy over the trailers, Cheney in mid-January declared they were "conclusive evidence" that Saddam had programs for producing WMDs. Yet at Georgetown, Tenet said, "There is no consensus within our intelligence community over whether the trailers were for that use or if they were used for the production of hydrogen."

Regarding chemical weapons, Powell said in his February 2003 UN speech the Administration's "conservative estimate" was that Saddam possessed 100 to 500 tons of "chemical weapons agent." The flawed NIE had not been as definitive. It noted that "we have little specific information on Iraq's CW stockpile," but it added that Saddam "probably" had 100 tons and "possibly" 500 tons. Tenet told his Georgetown audience that "initially the community was skeptical about whether Iraq had started chemical weapons agent production." But, he added, once analysts saw satellite photos of shipments from ammunition sites, they concluded that Iraq was cooking up chemical weapons. That view was not unanimous. In September 2002 the Defense Intelligence Agency reported, "There is no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons." And when Powell displayed satellite photos at the UN to back up his chemical weapons claims, independent analysts did not find them persuasive. Jonathan Tucker, a former weapons inspector who specialized in chemical weapons, said they probably indicated Saddam had some chemical weapons but "not huge amounts." Kelly Motz, another weapons specialist, said, "The evidence is still circumstantial and open to interpretation."

Bush and Cheney were particularly brazen when they declared that Saddam was revving up efforts to develop a nuclear bomb. In August 2002 Cheney said, "We now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons.... Many of us are convinced that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon." The next month Bush claimed a 1998 International Atomic Energy Agency report had said Iraq was six months away from producing a bomb. (No such report existed, and the IAEA in 1998 had said its inspectors destroyed the known components of Iraq's nuclear weapons program.) In December 2002 Bush said, "We don't know whether or not [Saddam] has a nuclear weapon"—a remark that suggested he might have one. But no sane intelligence analyst believed Saddam possessed such weapons. "We said Saddam Hussein did not have a nuclear weapon," Tenet recalled. And the NIE did not depict his program as an immediate threat. It noted that Iraq would probably only be able to produce a bomb by 2007 to 2009 "if left unchecked."

In public, Bush Administration officials pointed to Iraq's acqui-

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sition of aluminum tubes and its supposed interest in buying uranium in Africa as signs of a renewed program. Neither of these infamous claims has held up. But before the war, intelligence analysts at the Energy and State departments dissented from the view that the aluminum tubes were destined for a nuclear weapons program, and the State Department analysts called the uranium-from-Niger charge "highly dubious." They also concluded, according to the NIE, that there was no "compelling case that Iraq is currently pursuing...an integrated and comprehensive approach to acquire nuclear weapons." These analysts were not the only ones who accurately assessed the situation. On March 7, 2003, IAEA director general Mohamed ElBaradei reported that his agency's renewed inspections had found "no indication of resumed nuclear activities...nor any indication of nuclear-related prohibited activities at any inspected sites."

There were other areas where intelligence analysts were more on target than melodramatic Bush officials. In his Cincinnati speech, Bush said, "We've also discovered through intelligence that Iraq has a growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to disperse chemical and biological weapons across broad areas." He raised the prospect of Iraq attacking the United States with these drones. But the NIE concluded only that Iraq had a "development program"—not a "growing fleet"—of UAVs. And the intelligence analysts with the most expertise in the UAV area—those at the Air Force—believed that the UAVs under development were intended for reconnaissance, not WMD attacks. "The jury is still out," Tenet said, "on whether Iraq intended to use its newer, smaller [UAVs] to deliver biological weapons."

David Kay has said the intelligence community owes the President an explanation. But Bush owes the public one.

Much of the current controversy over the prewar intelligence has fixated on WMDs. But Bush's primary case for war was based on the suppositions that Saddam had horrible weapons, had an operational alliance with Al Qaeda and would be willing to share his WMDs with the murderers of 9/11. In November 2002 Bush said Saddam was "dealing with" Al Qaeda. At the UN Powell said there was a "sinister nexus" between the Iraqi dictator and Al Qaeda. Aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, Bush called Saddam an "ally" of Al Qaeda.

But the NIE's "key judgments" did not conclude that Saddam Hussein was in cahoots with Osama bin Laden, and the estimate reported that intelligence analysts believed Saddam would consider slipping chemical or biological weapons to a terrorist outfit only as an "extreme step" if he were "already engaged in a life-or-death struggle against the United States." Prior to the invasion, war opponents and some terrorism experts challenged the Administration's efforts to link Iraq to Al Qaeda. After Powell's presentation at the UN, Judith Yaphe, a senior fellow at the National Defense University who'd worked for twenty years as a CIA analyst, said that Powell's description of the purported connection between the two "appeared to have been carefully drawn to imply more than it actually said." And intelligence officials quoted anonymously in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* revealed there was no solid confirmation of such a link. To date, no strong proof of an operational relationship between Al Qaeda and Saddam has emerged. In fact, captured Al Qaeda leaders have told interrogators there was no partnership between bin Laden and Saddam. Their word, of course, is suspect. But is Powell's? In mid-January, he conceded, "I have not seen smoking-gun concrete evidence about the [Saddam–Al Qaeda] connection, but I think the possibility of such connections did exist and it was prudent to consider them at the time that we did." Prudent to consider the possibility? That's not how Bush put it before the war.

Tenet did not address the missing link to Al Qaeda in his Georgetown speech, but in defending his analysts he said they had never concluded Iraq was an "imminent" threat. Instead, he said, they portrayed Saddam as a "brutal dictator who was continuing his efforts to deceive and build programs that might constantly surprise us and threaten our interests." *Might*, he said. Bush turned *might* into *had*. While Bush seemingly never publicly used the word "imminent," he did say before the war that Iraq was able to launch a biological or chemical weapons attack within forty-five minutes and to hand WMDs to terrorists "on any given day." He warned that "Hussein and his weapons are a direct threat to this country," and the White House asserted that there was a "high risk" Iraq would use WMDs "to launch a surprise attack against the United States or its armed forces or provide them to international terrorists who would do so." What was the basis for such declarations? Not the intelligence in hand.

Before the war, many people in the United States and elsewhere—policy experts, past and present military officials, legislators and citizens—challenged Bush's depiction of Iraq as an immediate threat. It looks as if they, too, were right, as well as those who called for further and tougher inspections instead of war. Kay has acknowledged that the UN inspections process succeeded in "holding the [Iraqi WMD] program down and keeping it from breakout."

Kay's judgments are hardly final, as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has argued. (He can hope.) And the WMD search continues in Iraq—albeit with fewer resources. But the early returns are not good for Bush. As his new intelligence commission reviews the prewar intelligence, its members should not ask, Why did everyone get it wrong? Instead, they should wonder, Why did some get it wrong, but not others? Kay has said the intelligence community owes the President an explanation. But Bush owes the public one. The rap cannot be pinned entirely on the intelligence crowd. Bush has to answer for the way he used the intelligence. Kay, for one, has urged the commission—which will not release its findings until months after Bush stands for re-election—to examine whether there was "an abuse of the [intelligence] by politicians." That is a polite way of asking if Bush and his aides turned misinformation into disinformation. The overall assessment assembled by the intelligence community was, it currently appears, seriously wrong. The notion that the CIA messed up has become widely accepted, and Bush and his allies may attempt to hide behind the cloak of the spies. But Bush & Co. took the dubious work produced by the intelligence agencies and made it even more wrong. Can they—will they—get away with it? ■

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TWENTY WAYS TO THINK ABOUT BUSH AND HIS MONEY

By Micah L. Sifry & David Corn
Artist: RJ Matson

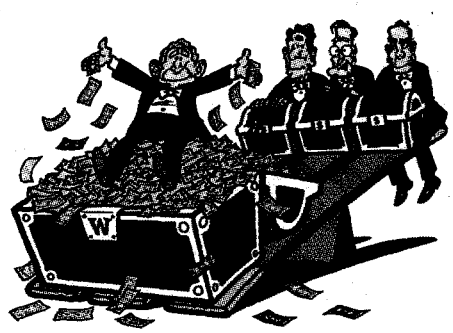
If the Bush campaign had wanted to spend all its cash in one shot, it could have purchased 108 thirty-second ads during the Super Bowl. .....

While the Democratic presidential candidates were bickering among themselves over accepting campaign contributions from lobbyists, a far more significant political development occurred: George W. Bush broke his own record for presidential fundraising. He hit $131 million as of the end of January. (In 2000 he raised $101 million for the entire race.) His campaign aides have said their goal is $170 million. But at the rate he's going, Bush is on track to bag more than $200 million, perhaps even a quarter of a billion dollars. And all this is for a primary campaign in which he has no opponent. Bush will have to spend these funds before the GOP convention in September. That is when his campaign will get a check from the US Treasury for about $74 million, under the law that provides public funding to presidential candidates for the general election. Even though Bush has no rivals in his bid for the Republican nomination, he does have to face attacks from the Democrats. It is not unreasonable for him to raise some money for that. But $250 million? In politics—as in most walks of life—this is a mind-boggling sum. So we have crafted a few unorthodox measurements to place Bush's pile of moola in perspective.

The Bush campaign could practically assume the payroll of both the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox.

Two hundred fifty million dollars would purchase enough body armor—including the necessary ceramic plates—for 166,666 GIs. As of January, the Pentagon had still not fully met the demand for body armor in Iraq.

Bush could compensate 20,000 Enron workers for their loss in pension funds—but at only about 25–50 cents on the dollar. And Bush's projected campaign total will nearly equal the amount Enron would have received from the retroactive corporate-tax rebate Bush tried (and failed) to enact after 9/11.



It's two and a half times the fine that Merrill Lynch, the single largest contributor to the Bush re-election campaign, paid state regulators for misleading stock-market investors. It's fifty times the penalty that PricewaterhouseCoopers, Bush's second-largest contributor, paid for violating auditor independence rules.

This is the cost of removing 23 million landmines in Egypt left over from World War II.

More than half of Bush's treasure chest, as of December 8, had come from 29,803 (presumably well-to-do) contributors who had donated the maximum permissible amount of $2,000. This group is thirty times the size of the 1,000 new jobs created nationwide in December.

Bush's 2004 take will be more than the combination of all the money Ronald Reagan, George Bush I and Bob Dole raised for their presidential campaigns from 1980 to 1996, adjusted for inflation.

It is equal to the amount of funds Bush's new budget proposal cuts from the program that provides grants to firefighters for equipment needs.

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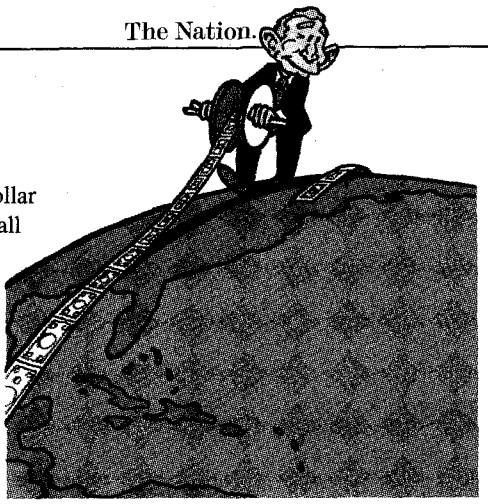
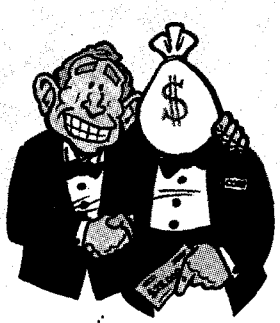


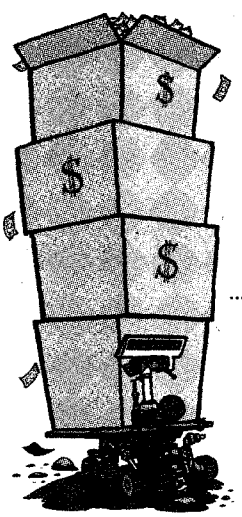
Bush's campaign millions—laid out end to end as dollar bills—would reach 24,226 miles and stretch almost all the way around the world.

If Bush raised $5,000 an hour—a good pace for most members of the Senate in an election year—and he did so twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (a rate most senators don't hit), it would take him 5.7 years to raise this much money. Fortunately for Bush, it takes only eighteen minutes of perfunctory remarks at a fundraiser to net several million dollars.



This amount would pay for nearly 10,000 backstage grip-and-grin photos with the President, which are routinely held at Bush fundraisers (cost: $25,000 a shot, not counting film and developing).

For 10,455 people, Bush could pay off their personal share of the national debt (the average liability: $23,911).



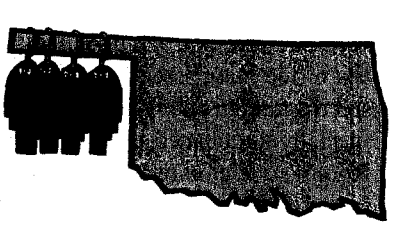
All this cash, in $100 bills, would weigh 5,115 pounds. On the Moon it would weigh 845 pounds; on Mars, 1,936 pounds.

The Bush campaign could buy Dick Cheney about 12 million pheasants to shoot.

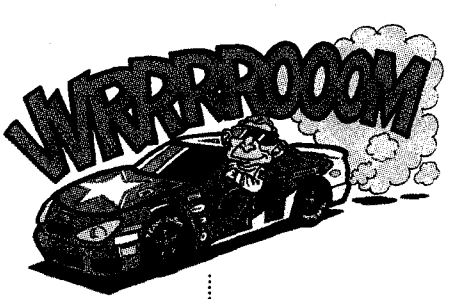
This is more than four times the amount Halliburton overcharged the US government for fuel it delivered in Iraq.

This is about $40 million more than all the large contributions ($200 and up) to federal candidates and parties that come from ZIP codes in America where racial and ethnic minorities are in the majority.

With this much money, Bush could rent 3.3 million tuxedos. The whole state of Oklahoma could dress formal for a day.



It would finance the US occupation in Iraq for forty-two hours.



In search of so-called NASCAR Dad voters, Bush could sponsor close to two dozen NASCAR teams for a year.

Micah L. Sifry *is senior analyst at Public Campaign. His next book,* Is That a Politician in Your Pocket? *(co-written with Nancy Watzman), will be published this summer by Wiley.* ***David Corn****, Washington editor of* The Nation, *is the author of* The Lies of George W. Bush: Mastering the Politics of Deception *(Crown).*

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STEPHEN CONWAY

An Idea Factory for the Democrats

ROBERT DREYFUSS

For Democrats suffering from Scarecrow Syndrome ("if we only had a brain"), John Podesta, the man behind the curtain at the Center for American Progress, thinks he has the cure: a $10-million-a-year think tank now taking shape in Washington. In a city heavy with well-funded right-wing think tanks (Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute, American Enterprise Institute, Hudson Institute, Federalist Society), the center is designed to provide some ballast for the other side. Starting in the 1970s, the conservative tanks have forged the ideas that built Fortress GOP. Podesta believes that what the Democrats need to "balance the national debate" is a Heritage Foundation of their own. Finally, the Democratic Party will have a "brain."

As yet barely known outside policy-wonk circles in Washington, within that world Podesta's center had generated lots of buzz even before it opened its doors last fall. Its arrival has been welcomed—eagerly, cautiously or jealously, depending on who's doing the welcoming—by the liberal and progressive Washington community. All agree that, at the very least, the center can add energy and ideas to the overall anti-Bush effort in 2004. But both Podesta's and the center's close ties to the Clintons, and their desire to appeal to Democrats across the political spectrum, have many people asking how much the center will accomplish in the end.

Podesta, a lawyer and twenty-five-year Washington veteran who worked for the Justice Department, for ACTION (the federal volunteer agency) and on Capitol Hill, is best known as President Bill Clinton's Chief of Staff. Now, backed by a small group of wealthy donors, Podesta is assembling a team of former Clinton officials, Capitol Hill veterans and refugees from other liberal think tanks. Thirty-five-strong and growing (around Washington, it seems like nearly everyone with liberal credentials has sent a résumé to Podesta), the center also includes a phalanx of big-think "fellows," including Ruy Teixeira, Gene Sperling, Matt Miller and *The Nation*'s Eric Alterman. Podesta's second-in-command is Morton Halperin, the longtime national security and civil liberties activist, while Laura Nichols, a former top aide to Representative Dick Gephardt, oversees a stable of media-relations experts. The center already boasts a significant web presence (www.centerforamericanprogress.org), and its daily *Progress Report*, compiled by former Capitol Hill aide David Sirota and delivered electronically to 28,000 subscribers, is a political junkie's "Bush Watch."

Podesta, who has gotten people up and running on white papers and policy initiatives on everything from homeland security to public education, relishes comparisons between his center and Heritage. "I'm a policy wonk at heart," he says. In its first few months, the center has organized a two-day conference on national security, issued a detailed critique of President Bush's record on antiterrorism and civil liberties, prepared a thoughtful analysis of the just-passed Medicare prescription drug bill and sponsored a foreign policy address by Senator Edward Kennedy.

Especially anticipated is the center's much-touted talent for War Room–style counterpunch and its media team's ability to wage hand-to-hand combat against conservatives on TV gabfests, talk-radio and the op-ed pages of the daily papers. Heritage has won deserved envy and awe on the left for its ability not only to generate ideas but to place them squarely at the center of public attention—in the media, on Capitol Hill and among the capital's intelligentsia. At Podesta's center, a nine-person communications staff, led by Debbie Berger, a former booker for CNN's *Cross-*

Robert Dreyfuss is a Nation *contributing editor.*

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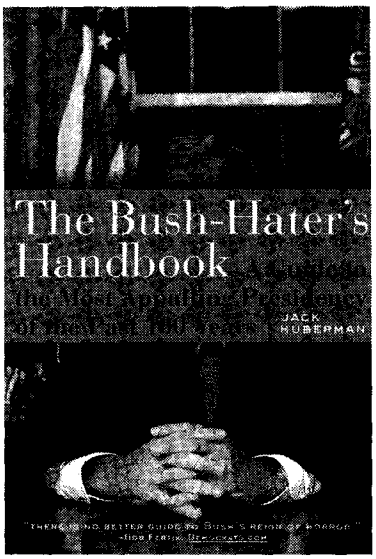

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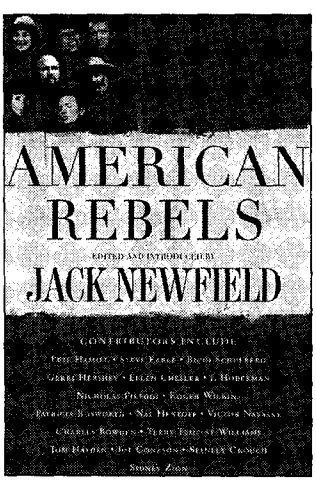

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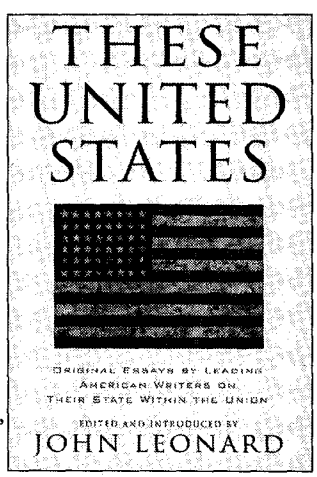
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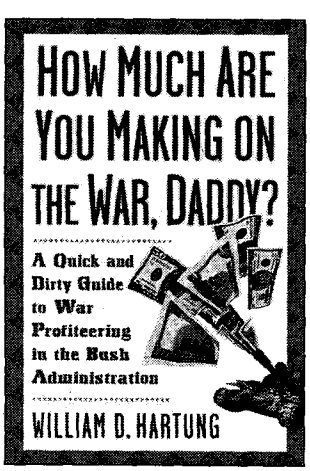
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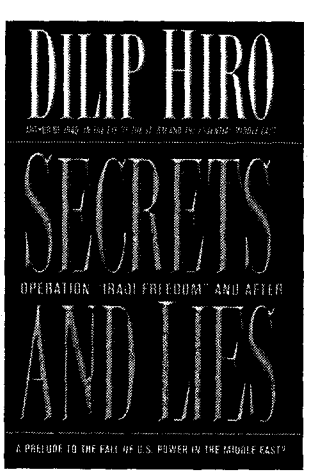

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fire, is busy collecting and indexing liberal talking heads and getting them placed on talk shows and interviewed by print reporters. Center staff and fellows have written more than a dozen op-eds and made more than 200 television and radio appearances in six months, and Nichols and Berger plan to organize a media-training program. Already, talk-show bookers around town are saying that the center is a handy place to go. "For conservatives, we can call Heritage or AEI," said one. "Now we have a place to get liberals." And the center—which has a lobbying arm in formation—says it will not shy from plunging directly into legislative battles in Congress.

The idea for the center began with discussions in 2002 between Halperin and George Soros, the billionaire investor. Soros, whose money has jump-started a panoply of anti-Bush political organizations, wanted to help create an institution that would be big enough, and well funded enough, to get off the ground right away and have an impact. Halperin, who heads the Washington office of Soros's Open Society Institute, brought Podesta into the discussion, and beginning in late 2002 Halperin and Podesta circulated a series of papers to funders. At the end of 2002 a California banker and backer of human rights causes named Herb Sandler came knocking on Podesta's door. He'd heard about the Halperin-Podesta venture from Aryeh Neier, former head of Human Rights Watch, who'd worked with Soros (Neier currently serves on the board of directors of the Center for American Progress). How much of the $30–35 million, three-year funding raised for the center comes from Sandler isn't clear, but it's probably in the range of two-thirds, since Soros committed only $3 million to the project. Podesta has a third major funder, but he won't disclose who it is, and seems overly cautious in talking about his backers. Though he admits that corporate funding can influence the outcomes of think tanks and politicians alike, he isn't ruling out getting money from corporate America or, for that matter, from labor. But so far the center hasn't gotten either.

'What people want to hear is that Democrats are fighting for something.... It's not a lack of ideas.'
—Donna Brazile

"Our assumption was that you had to be at scale," Podesta says, explaining why he believes a big budget is essential. "You had to grow an operation that was pretty big, fast." With the center budgeted at $10 million for 2004, Podesta says he'd like to be at the $15-20-million-a-year level soon. The center is already in the big leagues of Washington think tanks, eclipsing older centrist-to-left groups like the DLC's Progressive Policy Institute ($2.4 million), the Economic Policy Institute ($5 million), the Campaign for America's Future ($4 million), the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities ($8 million) and the Institute for Policy Studies ($2.4 million). (Says an envious denizen of a rival tank, "It's a lot easier to raise money when you've got Robert Rubin and Hillary Clinton helping you with your fundraising.") And while it doesn't quite put the center into the ballpark with Heritage (now a $33-million-a-year shop) financially, at least it's in the same league.

For all the comparisons with Heritage, however, and despite the desire among many Democrats for a liberal idea factory, it's possible both to overstate the importance of Heritage and to exaggerate the Democrats' need for so-called "new ideas." In the past (say, with the arrival of the Democratic Leadership Council), talking about new ideas was a not so covert way of saying that the "old" Democratic ideas were passé. "Often when people say we need new ideas, they really mean they're looking for centrist ideas, and they dress them up to look new," says Max Sawicky, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute. Adds Jeff Faux, an economist and former head of EPI, "There does seem to be, in the Democratic Party, the constant search for the New Idea, when the fundamental problem is that there are plenty of ideas we haven't succeeded in implementing yet." Donna Brazile, the organizer who managed Al Gore's 2000 campaign, wishes Podesta well. But, she says, "the last thing we need is fifteen-page papers on this and that. What people want to hear is that Democrats are fighting for something, that they stand for something, that they have convictions. It's not a lack of ideas." Newt Gingrich's Contract With America, she points out, fit on a single page.

And while the Heritage Foundation is important, its wonks didn't generate the radical decline in unionism, the growth of the Christian evangelical movement, the alienation of white working-class males from progressive causes, the race-based Southern strategy that locked up the former Confederacy for the GOP, the middle-class tax-revolt movement and other seismic shifts that propelled the post-1970s realignment in US politics. Nor did Heritage corrupt the Democratic Party, addicting it to corporate money and pulling it to the right. The Democrats, thanks to the DLC and politicians like Bill Clinton, did that all by themselves.

In looking at Podesta's center, there's no escaping the imprint of the Clintons. It's not completely wrong to see it as a shadow government, a kind of Clinton White-House-in-exile—or a White House staff in readiness for President Hillary Clinton. Among senior staff and fellows at the center are several former Clinton-era officials, including Robert Boorstin, who was Clinton's national security speechwriter; Gene Sperling, who headed Clinton's National Economic Council and who is now affiliated with the DLC; and Matt Miller, senior adviser to Clinton's Office of Management and Budget. The center's first director of domestic policy was Neera Tanden, an aide to Senator Clinton, who has since returned to work for Hillary. And the center's kickoff conference on national security in October, co-organized with *The American Prospect* and the Century Foundation, looked like a Clinton reunion, featuring Robert Rubin, Clinton's Treasury Secretary; William Perry, his Defense Secretary; Sandy Berger, his National Security Adviser; Richard Holbrooke and Susan Rice, both Clinton-era Assistant Secretaries of State; Rodney Slater, his Transportation Secretary; and Carol Browner, his EPA Administrator, who serves on the center's board of directors.

"We've had the challenge of filling a void on our side of the ledger for a long time, while the other side created an infrastructure that has come to dominate political discourse," says Hillary Clinton, who was also there. "The center is a welcome effort to fill that void."

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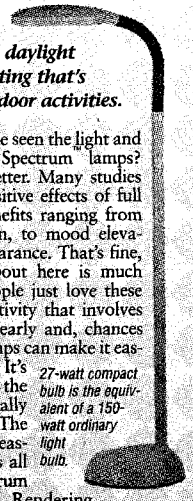

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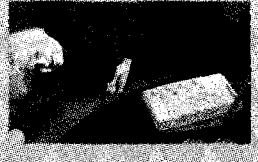

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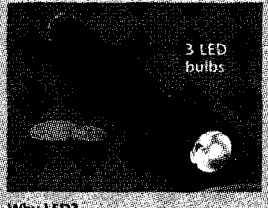

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Though the center is often touted as the answer to a decades-old longing by Democrats to have a think tank of their own, in fact Podesta seems to see it as reconstituting a function that was provided by Clinton's White House. "The need for a progressive counterpart [to the Heritage Foundation et al.] was less obvious when a more progressive President occupied the White House," says a fundraising prospectus circulated privately in early 2003. "The vast resources of the executive were available to develop new policy initiatives." That doesn't sound like someone arguing that the Democrats have lacked good, new ideas for thirty years—only since January 2001, when Clinton wasn't there any longer to hand them out. Indeed, much of the left spent the 1990s lulled by the charismatic power of a single politician whose skills were such that it didn't seem necessary to organize, amass research and data, hammer out a program and then communicate the hell out of it—Bill was doing that, even if he often got mesmerized by someone like Dick Morris and came up with welfare reform or bombing Sudan or signing the Defense of Marriage Act or backing the World Trade Organization and NAFTA.

Podesta enjoys using the word "liberal" to describe the center, and frequently calls it "progressive." He also calls it "center-left." Thus muddled together, these terms lose their meaning, and it's quickly apparent in talking to Podesta that in the battle between the Democratic Party's left and right he's trying not to take sides. (So attached to centrism are Podesta & Co. that they refuse to use the easily pronounceable acronym "CAP" for the Center for American Progress, preferring to call it "the center." Exactly.) Says John Cavanagh, executive director of the Institute for Policy Studies, "It's an attempt to redefine liberalism as Clintonism."

'The country has moved to the right. You get it back not by adding more weight to the center, but to the left.' —*Jeff Faux*

But that means the center is not really a political analogue of Heritage, which, along with the rest of the conservative revolutionaries, reserved its bitterest bile for squishy, middle-of-the-road Republicans of the Ford-Rockefeller variety. It's laughable to think that the conservatives would have succeeded had their funders—Coors, Scaife et al.—doled out millions to Gerald Ford, Everett Dirksen and Howard Baker. While the center is casting a broad net, in no sense is it seeking revolutionary change. It's a truth not lost on Grover Norquist, head of Americans for Tax Reform and one of the New Right's most successful organizers. All Podesta wants to do, says Norquist, is pull the country back to the Clinton era. It's as if the conservatives had spent the late 1970s and early '80s pining for the Ford Administration. "Podesta," says Norquist, "is arguing for a restoration, but he's acting like he's organizing a revolution."

Sitting in his office, just a couple of blocks from his old digs at the White House, I asked Podesta about the tug of war between, say, the DLC, which has spent nearly two decades dragging the party to the right, and the Campaign for America's Future, founded in the 1990s to yank the party back in the other direction—toward its base in organized labor, minorities and the working class. "We spend an enormous amount of money in the fight between the right and the left of the party, in the fight between the Campaign for America's Future and the DLC, without concentrating on the real fight," he says. "It's an untested assumption of mine that you can represent the center-left, that you can have an institution and a platform that can represent both sides."

That, of course, was precisely Bill Clinton's genius, and his curse.

Given its pedigree, it's fair to wonder whether the Big Ideas that the center comes up with will look less revolutionary than incremental, sort of like the laundry list of midsize ideas that used to fill a Clinton State of the Union speech. In an effort to find out, I pointed out to Podesta that Heritage backed many ideas that were once considered viable only by wild-eyed radicals but that became part of George W. Bush's campaign platform, among them dismantling public education through vouchers and charter schools, the privatization of Social Security and Medicare, radical tax reform, a huge military buildup and a missile defense system. I asked: Can you name a few such ideas, now considered far out of the mainstream (to the left) that your center can make palatable and politically viable in the future?

"You're asking me to do in a few months what Heritage has been doing for decades," Podesta said.

OK, so let me suggest one, I responded. What about public financing of elections, which actually passed Congress in 1992, only to be vetoed by Bush I. Before answering, Podesta paused—a long, long pause. "It's, uh, I think...uhh, I think it has some value. But political money is a little like water on a hill. It always finds a way to flow." I took that to mean that public financing is not an idea that the center is going to be looking at anytime soon.

I asked Podesta to suggest a similar idea, and he started talking about technology and a new approach toward containing the spread of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons—important, perhaps, in a wonkish kind of way, but not exactly a red-meat idea for the masses.

So I tried again: What about single-payer healthcare? Medicare for all? "Nothing should be off the table," he said. "But it's probably something we're going to have to build from the bottom up, in a more incremental approach. Hillary tried to do the whole thing at once, and it didn't work. And even she ended up with modified single-payer." I looked skeptical. "It wasn't real single-payer, right?" he asked. No, it wasn't. It was HMO-dominated managed competition, a plan cooked up by the insurance industry—nearly the opposite of single-payer.

Tax policy? On this one, the center has potential. Podesta said that Bush & Co. are trying to shift the tax burden step by step from corporations and the rich onto wage earners, and that Democrats are trapped into dealing with tax cuts on terms set by the President—which since the 1980s has meant Democrats have had to come out for raising taxes. "I want to see a taxation system that's fair, and that can sustain our progressive form of government," he said. Along with his still-expanding team of political economists, he would like to come up with a more sweeping plan to restructure the entire tax system.

In two other important areas, Podesta's center is likely to ruffle

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feathers on the left. The first is national security. Bob Boorstin, whose portfolio at the center is defense, said, "On the Howard Dean/Sam Nunn scale, we're on the Sam Nunn end," managing at once to insult the party's front-runner at the time and bind himself to the former senator from Georgia, a Dixiecrat cold war hawk who never met a military program he didn't like. Boorstin said that on national security Americans trust Republicans over Democrats by a gap of 35 percentage points. "My job is to take the thirty-five-point gap and shrink it, so that we're viewed as credible again," he said. "It's vital that we Democrats demonstrate through our ideas that we are not a bunch of wimps." The bloated military budget, now $400 billion and counting, is fine with Podesta; a paper he co-wrote says: "Democrats should support sustaining the increased military funding level for [the Defense Department] that has occurred since 9/11. Funding DOD at this higher level will keep the military second to none, now and in the future."

The second problem area is trade. Podesta, like Clinton, is a staunch advocate of free trade, NAFTA et al., which he calls "open markets." Podesta points to efforts by Clinton to prohibit child labor and to work labor standards and environmental protection into trade agreements, but he acknowledges that it will be difficult to find a policy that will be acceptable both to Wall Street and to the AFL-CIO. "If you start by thinking about how to sell it to John Sweeney and to Sandy Weill, you're in trouble," he says. "I don't think we can get away with it."

Criticism of Podesta's new venture by Democrats is muted. Both left and moderate Democrats, including those from other think tanks, say nice things about the center for attribution, keeping more skeptical comments off the record. From the left, the tenor of the skepticism is captured by Jeff Faux. "The question is, Will there be any populist bite to this crowd?" says Faux. "The question I have is whether this starts the process too close to the center. The country has moved to the right. You get it back not by adding more weight to the center, but to the left." Yet there's a willingness to welcome Podesta's center because of the liberals' popular front against Bush/Cheney 2004. "The more the merrier," says Will Marshall, who heads the DLC's PPI. Although the center itself won't engage in electoral politics, it will engage Bushism on several fronts, helping to develop position papers that Democratic candidates can use, highlighting Bush's failures in foreign and domestic policy and getting articulate critics of Bush on TV and radio.

But beating Bush is one thing; forging a "center-left" policy consensus is another. Despite Podesta's desire to be all things to all Democrats, the muted criticism of his center so far will grow from off-the-record murmurings to frontal assaults from both sides of the Democratic divide as he is forced to take sides in policy debates on national security, deficit spending, trade, entitlements and other tough issues. Bill Clinton managed to walk that tightrope for eight years, mostly with success; but it remains to be seen whether or not Podesta will fall off. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

Alger's day, women couldn't vote or own property, most colleges would not accept our applications and we were barred from many professions. Krugman may be right about father-son mobility, but how about mother-daughter mobility? I am the first woman in my extended family to earn a graduate degree. My earning power is far greater than my mother's, and while she could not have supported a family above the poverty level, I can easily do so. JENEVA STONE

YOU CALL THAT A REVIEW?

Kensington, Calif.

■ John Palattella's review of my book *Dismantling Glory: Twentieth-Century Soldier Poetry* ["The War of Words," Jan. 12/19] reminds me of an old query: How many times does a reviewer read a book? Less than once. Using his review to vent his own ideas on war and poetry, Palattella nevertheless leans on much of my material, falling into paraphrase here, statistics and citations there—with everything he takes pulled from the opening chapters. As I read I kept wondering when my work and the reviewer's riffs on what I'd written would be sorted out; but this moment never came. There were only a few instances of "according to Goldensohn," when Palattella worked up to some point he disliked.

Clinging to a narrow definition of pacifism that severs it from any grounding in history or politics, Palattella then dismissed my specific analyses of poems: "She offers the poems as medicine for a happier world, but their complexities and contradictions cannot be distilled into a tablespoon-sized dose." Complexities and contradictions! In order to sustain this Pollyanna caricature, Palattella cuts from my discussion of Owen and Jarrell any hint of the real conflicts and unresolved tensions about war and bloodshed that I am at pains to show.

In comparing the scope of my book invidiously with Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Palattella ignores my addition of two more generations of poets to the mix, and that Fussell's *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* does not center on poets or poetry. Palattella passes over the gender issues I treat and Fussell omits and refuses to recognize any discussion in these poems of internalized war-guilt, or of complicity in war's atrocities.

From this review, you would never guess that about sixty-five twentieth-century war poets appear in my book, with extended readings of particular poets for each war. For depth of comparison, I include Homer, Archilochus and Gascoigne. It's hard to take seriously Palattella's complaint—with all due respect to his picks—that I leave out Kenneth Rexroth and William Stafford. LORRIE GOLDENSOHN

PALATTELLA REPLIES

Brooklyn, NY

■ Lorrie Goldensohn seems to think that because her book discusses the writings of well-known, and some lesser-known, poets, she must be cited as the source of those poets' work. That's odd, especially since W.H. Auden's "Spain," Keith Douglas's worries about the inadequacies of poems about World War II, George Oppen's poems about military force—these and the writings of other soldier poets, as well as scholarly works about war poetry—were familiar to me long before I read Goldensohn's book. As for her assertion that I pass over the gender issues that she treats and Paul Fussell omits: In fact, I discuss the homoeroticism latent in Wilfred Owen's war poems—a subject not unrelated to gender and one, as I note, examined by Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Goldensohn also claims that I refuse to recognize how the work of soldier poets deals with internalized war-guilt. Yet I mention that Randall Jarrell's war poems often grapple with the culpability of soldiers for war's violence, and I point out that Owen's poems sometimes embrace heroic conceits even as they deflate them. Their work, obviously, is riven with unresolved tensions. They are the strange lyrics of war. Why can't Goldensohn let those tensions stand instead of trying to herd them together under the banner of pacifism? JOHN PALATTELLA

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COMMENT

(Continued From Page 9)

had to take the lead in demanding further investigation into the behavior of soldiers who, by their own admission, committed horrific atrocities in Vietnam.

Why did major news organizations handle the *Blade* series with tongs, or not at all? As Daniel Okrent noted, major newspapers are rarely generous to their less distinguished rivals. But there seem to be other reasons as well. "There is a sense," the *Blade*'s Sallah told NPR's *On the Media*, "that we should not be too openly critical and evoke these painful memories of Vietnam when we're already in a conflict." Indeed, with a few exceptions like Ted Koppel, US journalists have been noticeably reluctant to ponder the contemporary relevance of the *Blade* report. It was left to the foreign press to wonder if there is any symmetry between US intervention in Southeast Asia in 1967 and the Middle East in 2004: "Tiger Force continues to be an active part of the US military," affirmed the Toronto *Star*. "It is currently on duty in the city of Mosul in northern Iraq." SCOTT SHERMAN

Scott Sherman is a contributing writer to The Nation.

LETTER FROM GROUND ZERO

(Continued From Page 10)

run Iraq when the war was over. Indeed, so great was his faith in these promises that he would later claim of himself and his fellow Democrats, "Nobody on our side voted for the war." What did they vote for, then? "We needed the legitimate threat of [war] to get our inspectors into Iraq." Kerry voted, it seems, for inspectors, not war. He and all of us got war.

Kerry's entire argument against the Administration therefore is not that it waged a mistaken war but that it waged a necessary war in the wrong way. Several interviewers have pushed him hard to explain his position. In August Tim Russert, on *Meet the Press*, noted that he was accusing the President of having "misled" the country and commented that this did not sound like someone who supported the war. Kerry disagreed. "Wrong," he said. "I supported the notion that we must as a country hold Saddam Hussein accountable for what he was doing." Only the conduct of the war bothered him. "And so I'm running because I'm angry at the mismanagement of how we worked with our colleagues in the world and how we, in fact, have conducted the war."

Russert proceeded to the key question: "No regret over your vote?" To which Kerry, dodging the question, answered, "My regret is that the President of the United States didn't do what he had said he would do"—namely go to war only when diplomacy was exhausted and allies were on board.

"Were you misled by the intelligence agencies?" Russert asked shortly.

Kerry wavered: "No, we weren't—I don't know whether we were lied to. I don't know whether they had the most colossal intelligence failure in history."

Chris Matthews of *Hardball* tried again in October. "Were we right to go to Iraq?" he asked.

"Not the way the President did it," answered Kerry.

Matthews pushed: Some other way, then? Would Kerry have gone to war if France—the symbol of the recalcitrant international community—had agreed? Kerry retreated as usual into generalities: "I would do whatever is necessary to protect the security of the United States."

Missing in all these responses and others Kerry has given is the answer to a simple, fair, necessary question—the one Kerry answered so memorably in regard to the Vietnam War: Was the war in Iraq a mistake? Disarming Saddam had been Kerry's only reason for going to war. If Saddam had no weapons of mass destruction, then wasn't the war a mistake, and wasn't a vote to authorize it a mistake, and hadn't he made that mistake? And wouldn't American soldiers (now totaling more than 500) as well as Iraqis (in their uncounted thousands) be once again dying for a mistake?

But—I can hear some readers asking—why talk about the past? Why jeopardize the famous "electability" that Kerry (whether intending to or not) acquired by voting for the war and turn the likely Democratic candidate (now ahead of George Bush in certain polls) into an antiwar man, "another McGovern"? Those risks are real, but so is the gain. For one thing, the issue of the war will not disappear even if, as seems likely, Dean fails to win the nomination. On the contrary, it is likely to grow in importance as the absence of weapons of mass destruction sinks in with the public and disorder in Iraq mounts. The essence of democracy is accountability. Kerry knows it. Of the President, he has rightly said, "George Bush needs to take responsibility for his actions and set the record straight. That's the very least that Americans should be able to expect from the President of the United States. Either he believed Saddam Hussein had chemical weapons—or he didn't. Americans need to be able to trust their President—and they deserve the truth."

They deserve accountability and truth from opposition candidates as well. Someone who is ducking responsibility for his own actions is hardly in a strong position to call someone else to account. The Kay report can even be seen as an opportunity for Kerry. Kerry made a terrible error when, credulously trusting the dubious intelligence proffered by an Administration even then obviously hellbent on war, he voted to authorize that war, but his responsibility is nowhere near as great as that of the President. He might even discover a political dividend. If he were to state that had he known in October 2002 what he knows now about Iraq's weapons program he would not have voted for the resolution, he would immediately win the enthusiasm of the antiwar Democrats, whose passion and resolve, thanks in great measure to Howard Dean, has brought a fighting spirit to the Democratic Party. Nor should he entirely shift blame to the Administration for lying to him. He should hold himself accountable for his own mistake. We need the winter soldier, now more than ever, back at his post. ■

Jonathan Schell is the author, most recently, of The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People *(Metropolitan).*

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Bush Family Values

ELIZABETH DREW

AMERICAN DYNASTY: Aristocracy, Fortune, and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush.
By Kevin Phillips.
Viking. 397 pp. $25.95.

It's hard to know which is more interesting: the latest book by Kevin Phillips or Phillips himself. A former Republican strategist—he was a special assistant to Attorney General John Mitchell during the Nixon Administration—Phillips famously argued in *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969) that Nixon's 1968 victory prefigured a long-term Republican hold on the presidency. That Phillips turned out to be wrong—long-term theories about politics usually are—made his prognosis no less provocative at the time. And he had a lot of company: Numerous pundits and scholars wrote about the long-term Republican "lock" on the Electoral College.

Phillips, who went on to write ten more books, including a biography of William McKinley, has gradually evolved into a muckraking populist. In *Arrogant Capital* (1994) and *Wealth and Democracy* (2003), he blasted the economic and political elite and raged against the growing gap between rich and poor in America. Now Phillips has written an arresting and important book about the Bush family and how it obtained wealth and power, *American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune, and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush*. It's an angry and fascinating book—though at times he stretches to make a point. And on a few matters he's just plain wrong. Nevertheless, Phillips has woven facts we knew and ones we did not into an original tapestry, one well worth study. He goes where a largely dormant press has not.

His essential point is that the Bush and Walker families—as in George Herbert Walker Bush and George Walker Bush—became powerful and wealthy through connivance, connections and counterfeit. Or, as Phillips puts it, "deceit and disinformation."

Who can forget "Poppy's pork rinds," which sat on President George H.W. Bush's desk and on the large table in the Cabinet room? (Phillips writes in the introduction that "the elder Bush [George H.W.] turned me into a political independent." He clearly finds aristocrats repellent.)

As Phillips points out, the Episcopalian, establishment Connecticut Yankee Bushes have transmogrified into wildcatting, fundamentalist Texans. Even the "wildcatting" is a fraud, Phillips argues: Midland, Texas, where Bush *père* settled after leaving Connecticut, is one of the wealthiest oases in the nation. George W. was eased into the oil business, as he was eased into all of his adult jobs—including, arguably, the presidency—through powerful, wealthy family friends, or "crony capitalism." When his businesses failed, family friends bailed him out. The lucrative buyouts of his oil business and of his shares in the Texas Rangers baseball team were arranged by family connections.

The Bush family, Kevin Phillips argues, became a political dynasty by way of connivance, connections and counterfeit.

As Phillips recounts, the family fortune was started by George W. Bush's great-grandfathers, the business entrepreneurs George Herbert Walker and Samuel Bush, both of whom were engaged in finance. Phillips finds several generational similarities among the Bushes. And he thinks, more than I do, that George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush look alike. In my observation, Bush the son resembles his mother—both in his facial structure and temperament. Both pass as easygoing and both are more than a little mean. Phillips quotes George W. as having said, "I have my daddy's eyes and my mother's mouth."

Phillips argues that the Walker and Bush

Elizabeth Drew, the former Washington correspondent for The New Yorker *and the author of twelve books, is a frequent contributor to* The New York Review of Books.

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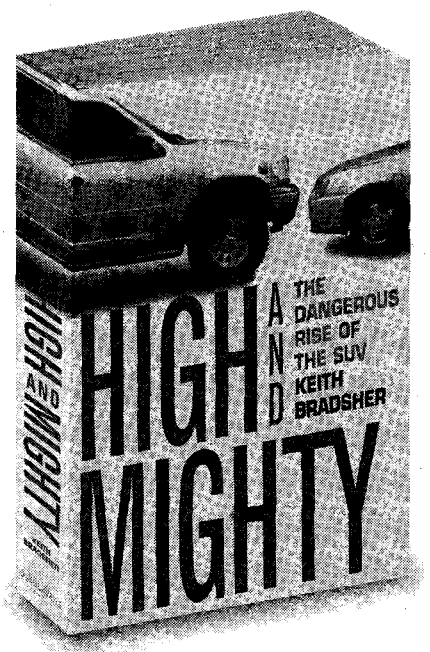

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families, along with other wealthy investment bankers, profited mightily from the rearmament efforts after the end of the First World War and were prominent members of the "military-industrial complex," about which Dwight Eisenhower warned at the end of his eight-year presidency, and which Phillips traces back to "the construction of a large steel-clad navy in the 1880s and 1890s" but really took shape during the First World War. (Phillips dedicates the book to Eisenhower and cites that particular excerpt from Eisenhower's farewell address.) The two families, he writes, were involved with "the mainstays of the twentieth-century American national security state: finance, oil and energy, the federal government...and the CIA, the National Security Agency, and the rest of the intelligence community." After Pearl Harbor was attacked, Phillips argues, "many who had cut their teeth during the 1917–18 mobilization were given much larger war-related responsibilities, cementing earlier elite credentials." And before he entered the Senate, George H.W.'s father, Prescott Bush, was a prominent Wall Street investment banker. "No previous presidential family," Phillips writes, "has been so wholeheartedly involved with a single economic sector over two generations, yet with so little scrutiny of the resulting narrowness of its public policy views." Inevitably, Phillips spends considerable time on the subject of oil. "Both Bush chief executives," he writes, "have been powerfully influenced and biased by their Texas milieu, especially in economic matters."

Of the old-school financiers, Phillips says that they "also diverted—one should not think they deserted—to Midland, the Ivy League beachhead in a boom-flushed state where the larger oil and oil service firms still had major ownership ties to Wall Street and the East." Midland was one of the two main towns (along with Odessa) in the Permian Basin, which, Phillips writes, "represented one of the century's great American wealth opportunities, which nobody knew better than the New York capitalists." (In a footnote, Phillips points out that by the year 2000 Alaska was the only state to produce more oil and gas than the Permian Basin.) This is where the "entrepreneurial" Bushes planted themselves. Phillips points out the nexus between oil profits and tax shelters, on which the industry is heavily dependent for profits, and asserts that investment bankers kept bailing out Bush *fils*. And Bush *père*'s brothers and sons—all but George W.—went into the investment business. As for George W.'s business career, Phillips writes, it "was spent primarily in obtaining new financing or lining up rescuers for his unsuccessful oil and gas ventures," and he quotes one wag as observing that every time George W. "drilled a dry hole...someone always filled it up with money for him." At Yale, Phillips notes, Bush the son wanted to be a stockbroker who amassed great wealth. He didn't become a stockbroker, but he did amass great wealth.

An important key to the Bush dynasty's political power, in Phillips's view, lies in the family's connections to the CIA. He goes so far as to assert that the CIA put George H.W. (the agency's former director) and his son in power. It's true that CIA employees and alumni backed George H.W.'s presidential ambitions, but I think Phillips goes too far in saying that they actually placed him—or his son—in office. Phillips's conspiracy theories about the CIA suggest that the agency's connection with the Bush family began with Prescott Bush, a handsome, undistinguished senator from Connecticut. (Phillips also states that Prescott was the first family member to harbor presidential ambitions.)

In making his case about the enormous power of the CIA, earlier and now, Phillips exaggerates its current power. Under George W. Bush, the CIA has become a weak cog in the Administration's foreign policy machinery. True, Bush appears to like (or at least he used to) CIA Director George Tenet—a smart, wily and entertaining man who has cultivated George W., even naming the CIA building after the President's father. (George W., for his part, tried to cultivate Edward Kennedy by, among other things, naming the Justice Department building after Robert F. Kennedy. The Kennedy courtship succeeded in getting Kennedy to back the No Child Left Behind education bill of 2001, a vote he later came to regret.) Tenet does see Bush nearly every day for the President's morning intelligence briefing and is in many meetings with Bush and/or his top foreign policy advisers. As the late George Ball, Under Secretary of State in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and an opponent of the Vietnam War, once said, "Nothing propinques like propinquity."

But the CIA has been severely weakened by the current Bush Administration. After all, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld set up his own intelligence unit to give him information about Iraq that would help build the case for war. The CIA's warnings that Iraq had not made as much progress on acquiring nuclear weapons as the Admin-

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istration claimed, and that Iraq had no significant ties to Al Qaeda, another Administration justification for war, were ignored. Moreover, Tenet was assigned, and accepted, the blame for Bush's mistaken assertion in his 2002 State of the Union address that "the British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa"—though he was only partly at fault. The White House insists that Tenet didn't read the drafts of that speech, though apparently one of his underlings did, and negotiated with the President's aides the wording the President used. The true origin of that line is among the many mysteries of the Bush Administration.

Then there was the Administration's meanspirited and perhaps criminal blowing of the cover of CIA agent Valerie Plame after her husband, former Ambassador Joseph Wilson, publicly disputed the Administration's claim that Saddam tried to import yellowcake from Niger. As it happens, Dick Cheney had been going to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia—a most unusual act for a Vice President—and reportedly leaning on officials to, among other things, validate the yellowcake assertion. The blowing of Plame's cover, of course, also gravely damaged the CIA. These particular events may have occurred after Phillips drafted his book, but other incidents that point to the CIA's current weakness had indeed occurred in time for Phillips to take note of them.

As for George W. Bush's brutal approach to politics, Phillips's recounting of the Bush campaign in 2000 oddly fails to mention the ugly smear effort it waged against John McCain in South Carolina. Phillips does write tellingly of Al Gore's egregious miscalculations in Florida in 2000. That both Gore and Bush ended up needing Florida so badly is a reflection of the fact that both ran bad campaigns, and both made big mistakes. That Gore got a majority of the popular vote is irrelevant, and he must know that, even if he can't admit it.

Of course, the Bush campaign, ably aided by former Secretary of State James Baker and the Supreme Court, did pull off a coup d'état in Florida. Moreover, Bush's 2000 campaign was one of the most deceptive in American history. (It far surpassed FDR's 1932 promise to balance the budget.) Bush managed to fool enough people—and most journalists—into thinking he would govern as a moderate or "compassionate" conservative. (After the nomination was in hand, he posed with little black children, much as Richard Nixon posed with his friend Sammy Davis Jr.)

One of the great values of Phillips's book is the light it sheds on the current Administration's policies—its radical anti-environmental, pro-energy-company, pro-business policies. Much of this has been attributed to Dick Cheney and his Halliburton connection, but Bush himself has had a large—perhaps the dominating—hand in these policies. In his 2000 presidential campaign Bush shed precious little light on his intentions in these policy areas. So in this respect, as well as on the war in Iraq, the American people were lied to.

Again pulling back the curtain on the policies of the George W. Bush Administration, Phillips maintains that the "implicit model followed during both Bush presidencies" was "*investment-driven* [emphasis in original]." Thus the tax cuts for businesses and the wealthy, the cut in the capital gains tax, low interest rates (the Fed, as other writers have demonstrated, is not as independent as legend would have it) and high levels of federal debt (acceptable, Phillips argues, if accompanied by investment in the United States). Though Phillips doesn't mention them, this investment orientation would also apply to Bush's proposals to pri-

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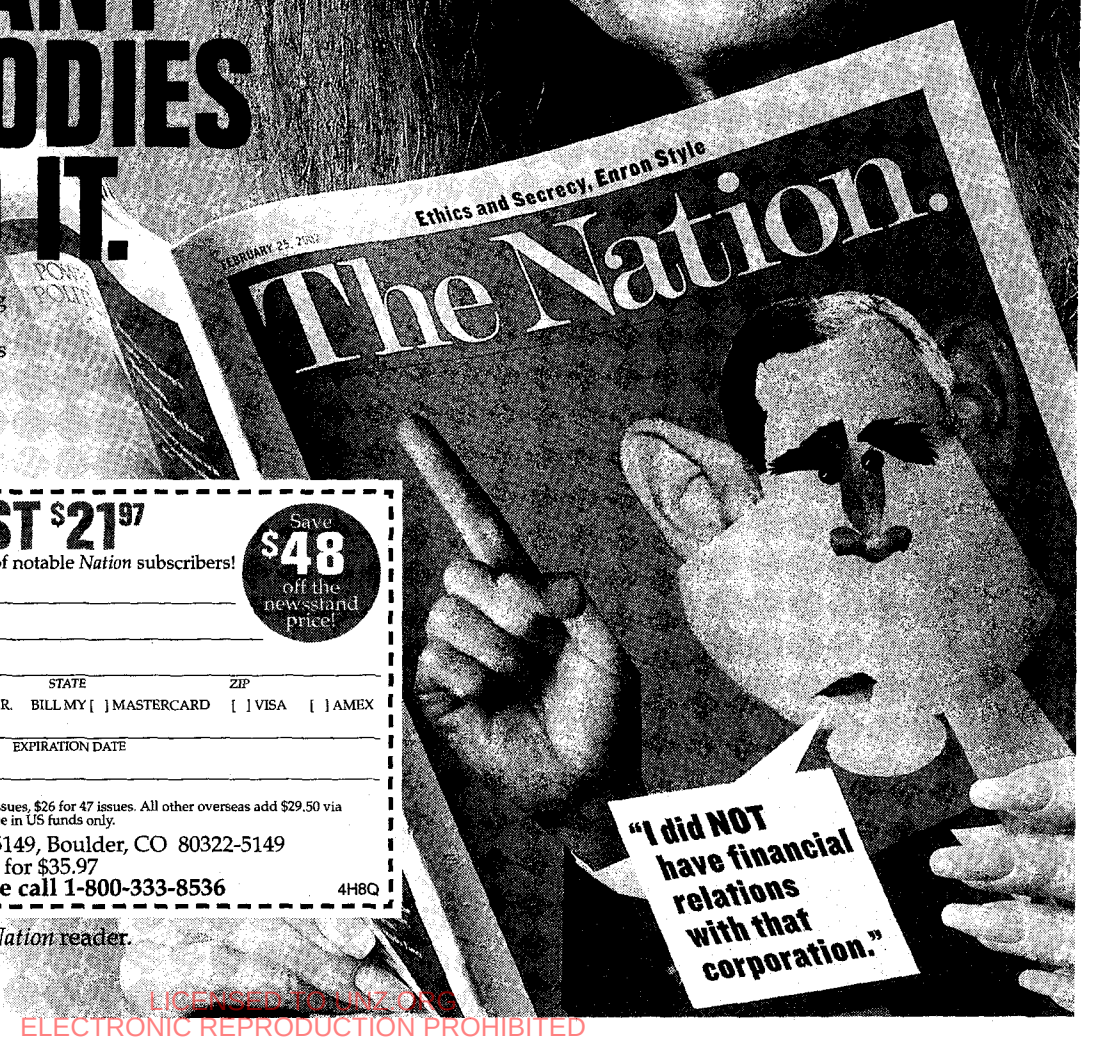

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vatize Social Security and his countenancing of the drying up of the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. It has been commonly thought that the purpose of these policies was simply to shrink the size of the federal government—which was succeeding until Bush, recently and to the outrage of his allies on the right, initiated some re-election-driven spending. He and his political henchman, Karl Rove, stop at little to win. George W. Bush's ruthlessness has been masked by his ostensible amiability. But that's yet another trick pulled on the American public.

As Phillips points out, the son takes after his father in this respect as well. The seemingly nice, humane George H.W. Bush allowed some fairly brutal political tactics—such as the infamous Willie Horton ad against Michael Dukakis, which played upon racist fears of black men and suggested that the hapless but decent Dukakis was soft on crime. The father had his "kinder and gentler" government and the son has "compassionate conservatism"—both of which have proved to be phony.

And both men (as well as Barbara Bush) are world-class resenters. They manage to hold grudges for years. Father, mother and son reportedly continue to resent James Baker for resisting (understandably) for a while Bush *père*'s plea that he give up his job as Secretary of State in order to run George H.W. Bush's race for re-election in 1992. That George W. has called on Baker for a couple of odd jobs signaled that he felt them to be crises. Bush the son and Rove also continue to resent—"hate" isn't too strong a word—John McCain for running against Bush in 2000 and remaining independent of him after that.

On foreign policy, on the other hand, father and son differ greatly on the importance of allies and of the United Nations (where George H.W. Bush once served as ambassador), and this is reliably said to distress Bush the father. Though the son has tried to repair relations with some European leaders—albeit not the French—and some European leaders have, because of their need for US economic and military strength, reciprocated, the damage was severe. And both father and son, of course, wanted to eliminate Saddam Hussein. The son memorably said, "This is a guy that tried to kill my dad." Though before, during and after the second Iraq war many people dismissed as delusionary the argument of numerous opponents, in the United States and abroad, that the effort to overthrow Saddam was, like the first Gulf War, about oil, Phillips makes a strong case that it was among the leading reasons for going to war.

Father and son have also disagreed on how to deal with Saudi Arabia. The father treated it as a place where he could do business (this is still the case, through his involvement with the Carlyle Group, a somewhat mysterious investment company in Washington), and he had close ties to leading members of the Saudi royal family. The son sees the Saudi government as out of touch and ripe for an overthrow. This may be in part a matter of the relative historical contexts of the two men's presidencies, and also their generational differences. But it's also a sign of the influence—or perhaps reinforcement—on the son by a small nucleus of neoconservatives in the Pentagon as well as of his more radical temperament.

As Phillips puts it, many observers mistakenly think that George W. Bush's policies are simply "the product of upper-class bias." In fact, George W. Bush is more radical than Ronald Reagan, and compared with George W., Richard Nixon, Phillips's original mentor, was a far-out liberal. Nixon's domestic policies were indeed moderate for his times; only Nelson Rockefeller and his lonely band of soulmates stood to Nixon's left. And now Phillips is on Nixon's left—and George W. Bush is far to his right.

So Kevin Phillips's personal journey resembles America's political journey—from the moderate Nixon to the radical George W. Bush, though at least half the country would disagree with, on the one hand, his earlier affection for Nixon or, on the other, his current populism. That Phillips has ventured where others—a very few others—have taken only a small step, or not even put a foot forward, is a great credit to him, and a commentary on the rest of us. ■

Company Man

TERRY EAGLETON

THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE. By Frank Kermode. Modern Library. 214 pp. $21.95.

The name Shakespeare in Britain is rather like the names Ford, Disney and Rockefeller in the United States. He is less an individual than an institution, less an artist than an apparatus. Shakespeare is a precious national treasure akin to Stonehenge or North Sea oil. He is to be ranked alongside King Arthur, Monty Python and the crown jewels as part of the nation's cherished mythology. In some quarters, indeed, he is almost as well-known as Billy Connolly. That right-wing troublemaker Prince Charles brandishes the Bard as a weapon in his campaign to defend the Queen's English, a language that in his case is literally his mother tongue.

Stratford, Shakespeare's home town, has become a place of pilgrimage only slightly less sacred than Mecca, with American tourists waddling reverently around the spectacularly tasteless cathedral of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. An impressionable few of them are even moved to doff their baseball caps or discard their ice creams. Shakespeare's familiar high-domed head, an image that is quite possibly not him at all, has adorned everything from TV beer commercials to the £20 note. He is the presiding genius of the national spirit, a kind of Churchill in a neck ruff. Without him, industries would crash and ideologies crumble. It is even rumored that he also wrote plays.

Not all the English have been so admiring. The eighteenth century found his work rather barbarous, while others have found his jokes dismally unfunny. Nor is he easy to appropriate as a patriotic Englishman. There is some swashbuckling chauvinism in his plays, but in *King Lear* he comes near to championing some form of socialist redistribution. The beauty of the drama, however, is that you can read into it pretty much what you will. There are, for example, times when it is almost impossible to believe that he had not read Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Wittgenstein. A fellow student of mine at Cambridge argued with a poker face that Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* is depressed because he is a promiscuous homosexual, basing his theory on Antonio's line "I have not placed all my treasures in one bottom." ("Bottom" actually refers to ship's bottoms.) This image was unaccountably passed over by the American scholar who delivered a paper a few years ago (without a hint of a poker face) titled "The Anus in *Coriolanus*."

Terry Eagleton is professor of cultural theory and John Rylands Fellow at the University of Manchester, Britain. His most recent book, After Theory, *has just been published by Basic.*

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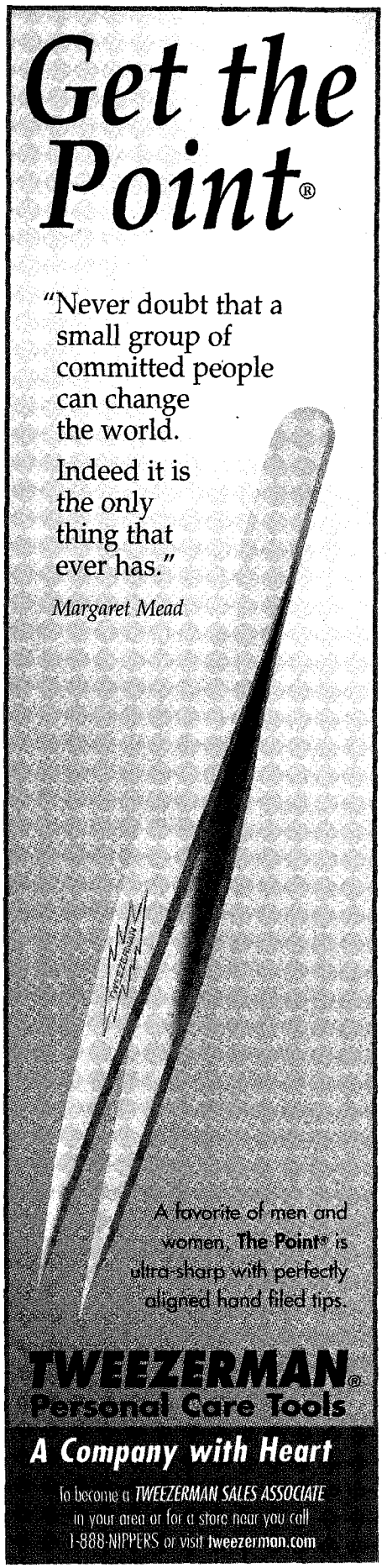
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Because of his totemic status, Shakespeare proved a valuable commodity to ship out to the colonies. Rather than sweat over textbooks on the English way of life, Indian or Caribbean school students could simply read *Julius Caesar* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The fact that many of the cultural references would have been unintelligible to them was less important than the fact that they were getting a blast of the very essence of Englishness. At home, Shakespeare was and remains the acme of the humanities. When unfounded rumors recently spread that one or two English universities had taken him off their syllabuses, the national outrage was equivalent to the reaction one might expect if medics were to announce that they no longer proposed to study the pancreas.

The Age of Shakespeare, Frank Kermode's informative introduction to Shakespeare and his times, has some incisive comments to make on the plays, sometimes of an appealingly irreverent kind: The young lovers of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are said to be "hormone-dominated," while Romeo is "in a melancholy amatory daze about a girl." The book has no particular case to argue, but it provides us with an elegant, economic survey of the politics and religion of the age, along with some shrewd speculations on the man himself. Oddly enough for a fairly low-born seventeenth-century working script-writer from the rural outback, Shakespeare is better known today than many of his contemporaries. It is true that we cannot be absolutely sure that the Will Shakespeare who was an actor (probably not very skilled) from Stratford-upon-Avon was also the William Shakespeare who wrote *Hamlet*. Some conspiratorial souls, for whom the Kennedy assassination has nothing on the Shakespeare conundrum, believe that the real Shakespeare was a nobleman who stole the name of this country bumpkin. This is because they find it hard to stomach the suggestion that a clod-hopping peasant who couldn't even spell his own name properly could come to rank alongside Dante and Goethe. One or two of the writers of his time also viewed him as an upstart, but this was probably envy: Shakespeare was big in his own day as he is in ours.

A few conspiracy theorists have even proposed the Earl of Oxford as the true Shakespeare, a claim zealously supported by the present Earl of Oxford, who could do with a little culture in his family tree. The only drawback to this eminently plausible case is that there is not a scrap of evidence for it. But at least Oxford was a nobleman, who could occasionally spell his own name correctly, and who like Shakespeare's plays would have known a thing or two about affairs of state. Much ink has been spilled on the question of Shakespeare's identity, including a somewhat fanciful book by a scholar named Thomas Looney. Kermode, for his part, takes it pretty much for granted that the boy who attended Stratford grammar school also later wrote "To be or not to be." (Shakespeare's work, as someone pointed out, is positively stuffed with quotations.)

Whoever he may have been, Shakespeare had a nose for business as well as an eye for metaphor. He was in on the ground floor of the flourishing new London theaters, won himself one-tenth of the shares in Lord Chamberlain's drama company (the most important stage company of the day) and ended up as a prosperous property owner. New Place, the house he bought himself in Stratford, was the second-largest residence in the town. Because of Lord Chamberlain's powerful patronage, he was a minor courtier as well as a commercial entrepreneur, thus combining in his person aspects of the old feudal England and the rising bourgeoisie.

As Kermode points out in this sparkling little study, Shakespeare was acquainted with much that went on in social ranks both above and below him as a result of his own ambiguous social status. It is a complex richness of experience to which his plays bear eloquent testimony. In fact, it is eloquence that one associates with him above all, as his characters produce torrents of unstanchable verbal intricacy just to announce that there is someone at the door. The butchers and candlestick makers in the pit may not have followed it all, but they were oral types accustomed to listening to rhetoric (in church, among other places), as we moderns are not.

It is remarkable how many of the most eminent names of English literature have been socially ambiguous. Jane Austen was a member of the poorer gentry—poor enough to be an outside observer of the governing class, yet genteel enough to know it from the inside. Most of the major nineteenth-century novelists were from the lower middle class, caught painfully between rulers and ruled, and so able, like Shakespeare, to look both ways. The Brontë sisters were the daughters of a down-at-heels provincial parson; Charles Dickens was the son of a feckless clerk in the Admiralty; George Eliot's father was a provincial farm steward; Thomas Hardy was the son of a small-time rural builder and alternated

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standard English with the local dialect. D.H. Lawrence's father was a coal miner, while his mother had genteel proclivities. Virginia Woolf was impeccably upper class, but as a woman was a misfit in the Establishment and married a Jewish socialist. All of these men and women knew the tension between aspiration and bitter reality. And it was partly out of this discrepancy that they produced such distinguished art.

Shakespeare went even further, caught as he was not just between two social classes but between two historical modes of production. His Globe theater was a profitable enterprise, charging only a penny for standing space (a third of the cost of a pipeful of tobacco), but able to accommodate an audience of 3,000. Even so, this budding capitalist venture still needed the protection of the court, and could suffer political censorship at its hands. Queen Elizabeth, an expert political operator, would have been quick to score a red line through any script that advocated popular rebellion.

With his usual exquisite sense of timing, Shakespeare managed to get himself born at exactly the right moment for artistic greatness. Major art often flourishes on the fault lines between civilizations, fed by complex cross-currents between one form of life and another. Tragedy in particular has flared up at these points of turbulent transition. Shakespeare's England was still a repressive, court-centered monarchy, in which Jesuits could be torn apart in public as popular entertainment. But Kermode points out that finance and commodity markets were growing apace, as middle-class opportunists like the Swan of Avon stealthily accumulated power. It was in the reign of Elizabeth that the joint-stock company first took off.

As Kermode remarks, in the real world of Elizabethan England, the usurer Shylock would no doubt "have been an investor in the flourishing corporations, or in the insurance business." Despite some truly catastrophic inflation, a minority of the British were thriving on the back of an expanding empire, enriched by the spoils from plundered Catholic monasteries. Meanwhile, the common people oscillated between starving and rebelling, staggering from one gargantuan food shortage to another.

The Age of Shakespeare is particularly informative about the physical aspects of Elizabethan theater, not just the literary ones. Though the Globe offered its audiences highly sophisticated stuff, it was surrounded by bearpits and mimicked them in its physical structure. The Rose Theatre next door was built on the grounds of a whorehouse. "All around," Kermode comments, "were cardsharps and dicers, con men and money-lenders, roaring boys and roaring girls." Shakespeare's fellow dramatist Christopher Marlowe, who may have been a government spy and closet atheist, was stabbed to death in a nearby tavern. As a probable homosexual, Marlowe risked execution for sodomy. It is possible that the man from Stratford had one foot in this raffish world, while the other foot was firmly planted in the sphere of big business and the court.

Though Shakespeare wrote prodigiously for his own company, he would no doubt have been amazed to know that what he was scribbling would later be regarded as "literature," just as Saint Augustine would have been astounded to be told that he was living in the Dark Ages. Shakespeare seems to have taken no trouble to proofread his plays. It has been estimated that some 3,000 theater scripts were produced in England between the 1550s and the 1640s, many of which, so legend has it, were destroyed by an eighteenth-century cook who used them to make pies. The story gives new meaning to the notion of literary taste.

Having made his pile, Shakespeare bought his father a gentleman's coat of arms, a bogus honor to which the old boy

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was egregiously unentitled. (There is some evidence that Shakespeare senior was a closet Catholic, and some scholars believe that junior was as well. Kermode himself remains unconvinced that he spent some of his youth in a kind of Catholic underground.) Shakespeare's steady progress up the social scale wasn't at all bad for a theatrical profession whose members had been lumped by the law with whores and vagabonds only a few years earlier, and who could still suffer the odd cold blast of disfavor from the Puritan city fathers. The Puritans disliked the theater because they feared that it would spread immorality, public disorder and sickness. The latter was a real anxiety in an era of smallpox, malaria, bubonic plague and a positive rash (if that is the right word) of sexually transmitted diseases. As for immorality, the sight of beardless boys dressed as women making love to men in public was not considered especially desirable by the Elizabethan equivalents of Pat Robertson.

The Age of Shakespeare is a marvelously compact account of the man and his social context. It packs into its brief compass some astute commentaries on the plays, and weaves together the theater, London life, high politics and acting techniques. Kermode writes a supple, lucid prose, with a touch of the English gentleman; he is good-humored, self-effacing, wears his erudition with ease and is too courteous to be polemical. The only mildly alarming feature of the book is that it appears in a series that also includes Bernard Lewis on the Holy Land. Perhaps the commission for the volume on democracy will be offered to Saddam Hussein. ■

Killing Time

BENJAMIN KUNKEL

DOUBLE VISION: A Self-Portrait. By Walter Abish. Knopf. 220 pp. $24.

From its unification in 1871 until its comprehensive defeat in 1945, Germany was the most bellicose and nationalistic of modern countries. Nowadays it seems just about the most reliably pacific and cosmopolitan. Yet the image of the German has hardly changed over a century and more. Aren't the Germans neat, correct, industrious, pedantic and a trifle over-respectful of authority? And doesn't their apparent humorlessness entitle us to laugh at them? Germany under Hitler indulged, to the point of genocide, a weakness for generalizing about other peoples. Our small revenge is to exempt the Germans from our usual strictures and to feel fine generalizing a little about them.

Besides, it's hard not to think about the Germans as such. The unequaled dimensions of the Second World War, the remarkable extent of both German culture and German barbarism, the special evil of the Holocaust, followed by the postwar economic miracle, and finally even the stupendous excellence of German cars and coffee makers—all of these make the Germans seem, against our better judgment, a kind of magical, symbolic people. We wonder what about them is unique, what if anything specifically German.

The question has preoccupied Walter Abish more than most. As a Jew who with his parents made a timely escape from Austria in the late 1930s, Abish has had his life shaped by a country he had, until mid-life, never visited. It was Germany that sent his family fleeing from Vienna to Nice to wartime Shanghai and then to Tel Aviv. In *Double Vision*, Abish alternates memories of this scattered exile with an account of his narrowing approach to Vienna, in 1982, by way of several German cities: As the narrative is structured, he gets closer and closer to home at the same time that he is getting farther and farther away. Abish would like to know who the Germans are or were to have had such a decisive effect on his life. He would also like to know who his parents were to have made him who he is. One effect of this scrupulous memoir is to suggest that the importance of these questions adds nothing to their answerability.

Abish traveled through Germany and Austria not only as a tourist but as an author promoting his book. In 1980 he had published *How German Is It*, a scabrous fantasy about the new Germany. (It turns out that the sleek, bourgeois city of Brumholdstein has been built directly atop the ruins of a death camp.) The novel bears a subtitle (*Wie Deutsch Ist Es*) translating its title proper, and Abish elaborates scenes of horror and confusion with that "cool ironic tone" he identifies, in *Double Vision*, as the register of classical German. Readers might be forgiven for imagining that the book has been translated. In fact, Abish is an American who writes in English, and *How German Is It* was composed without his having set foot in the country in question. As he explains in his memoir, "My intention in writing *How German Is It* was to present an equivocal yet neutral text to which the reader would convey his own emotional Germany."

On the face of it, this account of the novel seems off. Here is a bald statement of intention—about a book whose signal feature, as a psychological novel, is its refusal to ascribe definite motives to its characters. Why should Abish be any clearer on his own motivation? (As he says elsewhere in *Double Vision*, "Sometimes, motives are simply an afterthought.") It also seems a stretch to characterize *How German Is It* as neutral. Its various German characters, almost all deceitful, share a predilection for changing the subject whenever something uncomfortable comes up. Helmuth von Hargenau, the architect of a museum to be erected atop the buried past, flies into a rage when he finds his girlfriend has taken photographs of exhumed bones. And even Ulrich, Helmuth's decent-seeming brother, can't escape the prevailing contamination. Placed under hypnosis, the first thing he does is raise his right arm in that helpless Dr. Strangelove way. Much of Abish's sarcastic narration is similarly unsubtle: Confronted with footage of the camps, his Germans can't help wondering, "Did this really occur or have these photographs been carefully doctored, ingeniously concocted to denigrate everything German?"

The Germans have often been explained as a case of repression. D.H. Lawrence: "[D]as Heimatland [the homeland], der Tannenbaum [the fir tree]...das Bächlein [the streamlet]—the very words send a German into a swoon of love, which is as often as not entirely false. They make up their feelings in their heads, while their real feelings all go wrong. That's why Germans come out with such startling and really, silly bursts of hatred." As a thumbnail psychoanalysis, this seems insightful and even—in 1929—prescient. In *How German Is It*, on the other side of the war, things are much the same. Helmuth gives a public address rhapsodizing over "the German forest in which dwells our spirit, our ideals, our cultural past, our poetry, our truth," and full of narcissistic allusions to Teutonic cleanliness and order. The suggestion is that what

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sentimentality and hygiene once disguised, they might disguise still. Abish makes the point explicit when the breakage of a sewer main discloses the *Lager* beneath the city. (*Anus mundi*, some of the Nazis called the camps.)

In *Double Vision* Abish reacts suspiciously to German readers who doubt the neutrality, the looking-glass quality, of his novel. Doesn't their defensiveness reveal an unwillingness to own up to the past? The trouble with this idea is that it is unfalsifiable. The Germans either admit their worst traits—or they deny them. Either thing is taken as proof.

And yet Abish's skepticism wins out over mere suspiciousness in both *How German Is It* and *Double Vision*. He is rigorously and regretfully uncertain as to why people, whether real or made up, behave as they do. Abish belongs to the metafictional school of postwar American fiction; his work, like that of Barth, Gass, Coover and Hawkes, is a sort of virtuoso demonstration of the inadequacy of language, in which the words pretending to deliver the sweet truth are revealed as a bill of goods. If *How German Is It* has aged better than other metafictions, it's largely because of the pathos of Abish's uncertainty. There are, he steadily implies, answers to our questions of national and personal identity, but they lie outside of reach, so that our only contact with the truth is to long for it. The problem is particularly acute in the case of the Germans: It is vital to know why they did what they did and also, strictly speaking, impossible.

The other reason to read Abish is for his language, with its chilled comedy and rueful precision. In *Double Vision* he illustrates the tragicomic strangeness of a refugee community in Japanese-occupied Shanghai like this: "I can recall being made to memorize a long list of Israelite kings following the split under King Rehoboam, but not once did I hear mention of a Chinese emperor. After all, why study China? The thinking went that one could look out the window and pretty much absorb all there was to see of China." Amused in spite of his family's precarious situation, Abish as a narrator combines the reported traits of his parents—"the efficiently cool and remote mother" and the almost absurdly good-natured father. (Imprisoned temporarily in a Vichy French camp for "enemy aliens," Abish's father "maintained that the outdoor life was a pleasant change.")

Through most of its pages, *Double Vision* seems oddly unthematic, even disorganized. Abish presents his memories exquisitely, but what do they add up to? In the end you see that this open question is itself his theme. As both "The Writer" (visiting Germany) and "The Writer-to-Be" (fleeing the Germans), Abish wants experience to confirm his literary anticipations—as if to take photographs to which he's already written the captions. Real photographs, an obsession in both the memoir and novel, can therefore distress him. "Where was I when this photograph was taken?" The snapshot depicts his parents in France. "Who took it? It invalidates so much of what I have described. Did they feel a need to keep their affectionate relationship a secret from me?"

It's as easy to accept the premise of psychoanalysis—that the half-forgotten experience of our parents makes us who we are—as it is difficult to accept most of the conclusions. And something like this goes for the world of history and politics as well. Moreover, it will be some time before the Germans strike us, as our parents never do, as mere ordinary people. Samuel Beckett defined the problem of many sophisticated postwar novelists when he said that "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, together with the obligation to express." Substitute "know" for "express," and you get some sense of Walter Abish's dilemma and his achievement. ■

OBITUARY

Exile and the Kingdom

TARIQ ALI

The world of letters lost one of its most eloquent voices on January 24, when the Saudi novelist Abdelrahman Munif died in his Damascus exile after a protracted illness. Together with Naguib Mahfouz, Munif succeeded in transforming the literary landscape of the Arab world by making the novel central to its cultural and political concerns, just as it had been in Europe during most of the nineteenth century. The day after his death, in a unique tribute to his integrity, he was denounced as a heretic in the Saudi-owned Arab-language media, especially the newspaper *Al-Hayat* and Al-Arabiya television, a cable channel launched to compete with Al Jazeera. Munif's widow, Suad Qwadri, refused to receive the Saudi ambassador who had come to offer his condolences—a gesture almost unheard of in Arab culture.

Born in Amman in 1933 to a Saudi trader and an Iraqi mother, Munif spent his first decade in the Jordanian capital. Despite the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, this was still a world dominated by cities, a world where frontiers were porous and Arab families and trade moved comfortably from Jerusalem to Cairo to Baghdad to Damascus and beyond. All these territories (with the exception of Damascus and Beirut) were under the control of the British Empire. The lines had been drawn in the sand, but no barbed wire or armed guards policed them. Abdelrahman Munif went to primary school in Amman, high school in Baghdad and university in Cairo. Later he would recall the Amman of his childhood in a delightful memoir, *Story of a City: A Childhood in Amman* (1996), in which he described school life in the mid-1940s:

> Sometimes, the names of the cities in other Arab countries were confused with one another or not easily remembered, but all the hands of the students would shoot up when the teacher asked who could name five cities in Palestine. Competing voices drowned each other out: Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Gaza, Lydda, Ramlah, Acre, Safad, Ramallah, Hebron.... Palestine was more than just a land and a people. In the mind of every Arab it is a constellation of meanings, symbols and connotations which have accumulated and filtered down through several generations.

The names of the old towns of Palestine continued to reverberate in Munif's own head. He could never forget the Palestinian refugees whose anguish he had glimpsed in his early teens. Only a few months ago he referred to Sharon as the greatest abomination in the Arab East.

Throughout his teenage years he would spend the summer holidays in Saudi Arabia with his father's family. It was here that

Tariq Ali, an editor of New Left Review, *is the author, most recently, of* Bush in Babylon: The Recolonization of Iraq *(Verso).*

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he heard the old Bedouin stories and spoke with the oil merchants and the nouveau riche emirs who would later populate his fictions. The rise of Nasser in Egypt and the revolutionary wave that swept the Arab world as a result did not pass him by, and he became a secular socialist militant. For his political opposition to the royal family he was stripped of his Saudi nationality in 1963 and fled to Baghdad. There he found work as an economist in the petroleum industry and came to grasp the importance of the liquid gold that lay underneath the sands of Arabia and Mesopotamia. He turned his knowledge of the commodity and the industry to devastating effect in his novels.

Munif started writing fiction in the 1970s, almost a decade after resigning from the Baath Party leadership in Baghdad and moving to neighboring Damascus. His active political life was now at an end. Henceforth his mind was fully concentrated on his fiction. He wrote a total of fifteen novels, but it was *Cities of Salt*—a quintet based on the transformation of the Arabian Peninsula from ancient Bedouin homeland to hybrid tribal kleptocracy floating on oil—that established his reputation in the Arab world. He depicted the surprise, fear, uneasiness and tension that gripped Saudi Arabia after the discovery of oil, and his portraits of the country's rulers were thinly disguised, causing a great deal of merriment in the street and even in the odd palace.

The two M's—Mahfouz and Munif—became the patriarchs of Arab literature. Mahfouz's Balzacian reconstruction of family life in Cairo from the beginning of the twentieth century to the rise of Nasser won him the Nobel. Many Arab literary critics (though not Munif, who admired his Egyptian rival) felt that it was the Saudi who merited the award, but his savage and surreal satires of the royal family, their entourage and the oilmen made him contraband within official culture. He wrote of the oasis towns, small and coquettish in character, that were lost in the tidal wave of oil and replaced with tall symmetrical buildings that bore little relationship to the region or the environment. Munif depicted how the Saudi dynasty, with the help of the British Empire and later the United States, possessed the peninsula as sole proprietor and arbiter. Their voice and their interests drowned all else: Contrary opinions were forbidden, literature discouraged, free inquiry suffocated. But the world of ideas (nationalism, communism, revolution) was stirring elsewhere in the Arab world, and these could not be halted at the border. They entered the minds of many citizens, Munif included, and even infected a young prince or two.

Munif's books were banned in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the gulf. But they traveled nonetheless and were read secretly by many a peninsula potentate. Munif's books were novels of ideas, but they also resonated on the Arab street. He penetrated the internal lives of his fellow citizens, rich and poor.

Three novels of the Saudi quintet were translated into English by Peter Theroux—*Cities of Salt*, *The Trench* and *Variations on Night and Day*—and published by Knopf in New York. But the American critics did not like them, and John Updike famously denounced the books for having little resemblance to the fiction he was used to reading. When I told Munif this he chuckled and his hands gestured in despair. Despite his enormous popularity with ordinary Arab readers and literary critics (the late Edward Said was one of his biggest fans), he was not feted and celebrated by officialdom. He was proud of this fact.

I met him in the flesh only once, when I interviewed him in London for a TV documentary I was producing. He was a soft-spoken and modest man, genuinely bemused by the thought that a film was being made about his work. In that sense he was the polar opposite of some of the hyped Third World novelists in the West. Why, I asked him, had he chosen the title *Cities of Salt* for his masterwork? He replied:

> *Cities of salt* means cities that offer no sustainable existence. When the waters come in, the first waves will dissolve the salt and reduce these great glass cities to dust. In antiquity, as you know, many cities simply disappeared. It is possible to foresee the downfall of cities that are inhuman. With no means of livelihood they won't survive. Look at us now and see how the West sees us.... The twentieth century is almost over, but when the West looks at us, all they see is oil and petrodollars.... Saudi Arabia is still without a constitution; the people are deprived of elementary rights. Women are treated like third-class citizens. Such a situation produces a desperate citizenry, without a sense of dignity or belonging.

Munif was not in the least surprised that the majority of the 9/11 hijackers were Saudi citizens. After all, he had been warning us of what might happen for the previous four decades. His most recent work was a set of essays on Iraq. He had despised

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Saddam Hussein and written of the need for social democracy throughout the Arab world, but he was angered by the war and occupation. His son, Yasir, whom I met in the States a few months ago, told me that the recolonization of Iraq had reignited his old father's radicalism, and this is obvious in his last essays. The new situation forced him to put his fiction aside and wield his pen as a weapon against local dictators and imperial warmongers alike.

But it is as a novelist that he will be missed the most. He was a storyteller without compare, who enriched the culture of the Arab world as a whole. He was a strong and independent-minded intellectual who refused to bend the knee before prince or colonel. His work and his example inspired younger writers, both men and women, throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and for that reason I am almost sure we will see his like again. ■

FILMS

May Fools

STUART KLAWANS

THE DREAMERS • THE RETURN

Bernardo Bertolucci has long fed off a cinephilia he appears to despise. Think of some of the figures of fun he's put on the screen: the cafe intellectual in *Before the Revolution*, yammering fat-headedly about camera movements and Rossellini, or the film-mad fiancé in *Last Tango in Paris*, cuckolded before he's even been married. (While the lad raves about turning Maria Schneider into cinema, Brando is already working on the inserts.) Bertolucci has consistently mocked the elevation of film over life, while leaving his characters, poor dead insects, to glitter within the amber of his style. Can you find a more glaring contradiction in the work of any other bankable, international auteur? Only in the work of this same Bertolucci, who shrugs elaborately at political commitment (see *Before the Revolution*; see *The Spider's Stratagem*) and yet contrives to be seen as politically astute.

Now he sums himself up in *The Dreamers*: the story of three very young habitués of the Cinémathèque Française, who spend spring 1968 holed up in a Paris apartment, making love and talking movies, while the rest of their generation gathers at the barricades.

Anyone who has followed Bertolucci's work will know there's only one question worth asking about *The Dreamers*: How's the girl? The answer: She's everything you could hope for. And so are the guys, for that matter. Louis Garrel, as the epitome of slim and insolent French youth, appears as a kind of Oh! Boy: Jean Cocteau plus Jean-Pierre Léaud. Michael Pitt—the ingenuous American, who soaks up attitude in Paris when he's supposed to be studying the language—has the sculpted profile of a Nazi poster boy and the gait of Marilyn Monroe. But it's Eva Green, as Pitt's lover and Garrel's semi-incestuous twin, who is revealed as the movie's main attraction, and revealed, and revealed. Viewers who wait for Pitt and Garrel to consummate their passion will be disappointed by the tease; but those of us who are susceptible to Green will admit that *The Dreamers*, at a minimum, provides a memorable service. The world now has a complete camera survey of Eva Green at age 22.

You may think it strange that a film about late-1960s movie buffs should be destined so unmistakably for the DVD market, whose aficionados will watch *The Dreamers* very happily with the other hand on the Pause button. And yet it's not strange at all, since the chunks of film culture that Bertolucci folds into *The Dreamers* are porn of another kind. When the characters, playing their version of truth-or-dare, challenge one another to identify some vintage movie scene, the audience naturally joins in their game; and Bertolucci, quick to flatter and gratify, makes every ticketholder a winner. *Breathless*, *Scarface*, *Blonde Venus*, *Band of Outsiders*: These are the familiar reference points for *The Dreamers*, chosen, I believe, not because they'd be the characters' favorite films but because audiences will feel good about recognizing them.

Well, what's so bad about feeling good? In principle, nothing. In Bertolucci's practice, everything. The story he tells (attributed to Gilbert Adair, who has done good work in the past and so might not be the guilty party) starts off with the exhilaration of discovery—new experiences at the movies, new friends, new music. But soon, in a development that only becomes worse if you read it allegorically, the three denizens of dark theaters shut themselves away in a dim, labyrinthine apartment, where for the rest of the film they mope, argue, posture and pout in plush claustrophobia. No life comes in (except for a symbolic brick, hurled through the window at the start of the May uprising); and no life goes on.

If this is what old-style cinephilia was like (as *The Dreamers* claims), then we're lucky it's dead; and if this was truly the spirit of May '68, today's young people are right to tell us geezers to get stuffed. But maybe the most stuffable of the geezers is Bertolucci. Maybe the movies—not his, but other directors'—can actually open you to life.

"His actors do not behave like the actors in other films," as a certain critic wrote, back in the heroic age, "except in the sense that their gestures and attitudes are common to all human beings, but they urge us to look for something else behind this behavior, something other than what our natural role as spectators would prompt us to recognize. The old relationship between the sign and the idea is shattered"—and the filmmaker who dares to shatter it may receive "the remarkable privilege of conducting us into the most secret regions of the soul. Secret? Let's make our meaning clear: not the troubled zones of the libido, but the broad daylight of consciousness."

Despite what Bertolucci tells you, this is the possibility that originally excited the movie nuts in Paris, at the Cinémathèque and in the offices of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. It's still the great possibility. I'm quoting from an article in *Cahiers* by Eric Rohmer. He was writing about Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia*.

So let's take a trip—a Russian one. Say that two brothers—one on the verge of puberty, the other well into it—come indoors one late afternoon from playing and fighting in their town's crumbling industrial relics; and there in their mother's modest house, sitting at the dinner table, is their father, whom they haven't seen in twelve years. Where has he been? Why has he come back? Nobody explains. All Dad will say is, "Let's drink," as he pours each of his scared and fascinated boys an ample glass of wine.

This is the start of the voyage in Andrey

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Zvyagintsev's *The Return*, a road-and-boat movie that's all about space: physical distances that intimidate, emotional gaps that can't be bridged. Not that Dad doesn't try. When he packs his sons into a car for a get-acquainted trip, Dad begins a course of practical and moral instruction that he evidently regrets having neglected for all these years. Unfortunately, he conducts the lessons with no more gentleness than you'd expect from his taut body and seamed, unsmiling face. Maybe Dad (Konstantin Lavronenko) is a discharged soldier or pardoned convict; or, just as likely, he's a guy who ran off in the Yeltsin era to make money and didn't. Whatever his past, he now has no way to show love to his sons, except to demonstrate that the entire world is deep water, and a man can't waste time learning to swim.

The older boy (Vladimir Garin) at first rushes to please the old man. ("Did you see how he's built?" he whispers excitedly to his brother. "He's huge.") But the younger son (Ivan Dobronravov), who still tends to cling to Mama, hangs back sullenly from the father, and so absorbs blow after blow. (You don't want to dawdle over lunch with Dad or question his itinerary.) At last the trio leave behind the Russian back roads and take a little motorboat to an island in Lake Ladoga; and there the final confrontation plays out in a setting that is natural and wild, except for the discordant presence of a derelict shack and a rickety old watchtower.

Because Zvyagintsev has a way of making the landscape seem more eloquent than the suffering human figures it enfolds, his supporters are likening him to Tarkovsky. It's an obvious sales pitch, and one that does Zvyagintsev no good at all. Why should he be asked to live up to Tarkovsky's films, which were an unrepeatable eruption within world cinema? *The Return*, by contrast, is clearly a commodity made for a known market niche—but a good commodity, honestly crafted and filled with unquiet awe at the way we stumble and sink on our voyages, yet usually keep going.

Here is one current film that does take place in "the broad daylight of consciousness"—and also in its shadows.

Screening Schedule: BAMcinématek, the film repertory program of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, is showing The Best of the African Diaspora Film Festival, February 20–26. I can't claim familiarity with all fifteen pictures on the schedule, let alone with the five continents they represent; but let me at least mention two. *The Other World* (2001), by the extraordinary Algerian filmmaker Merzak Allouache, is a feature-length drama about a young, well-assimilated Parisienne who journeys into the rural interior of the home country, into the midst of its Islamist insurgency. *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property*, by the great Charles Burnett, appears to be a fairly straightforward made-for-TV documentary for most of its fifty-eight minutes, until (being a Burnett film) it suddenly turns inside out. For information on the series: (718) 636-4100 or www.bam.org.

An unrealized early screenplay by Krzysztof Kieslowski is the source of *The Big Animal* (2000), directed by and starring his longtime collaborator Jerzy Stuhr (perhaps best known for playing the lead in *Camera Buff*). This brief and charming fable—not too charming, of course—concerns a magnificent two-hump camel, left behind in rural Poland by a traveling circus and adopted by a bank clerk and his wife, to the consternation of their neighbors. The camel doesn't do anything, you see; there's no profit in it. Now released in the United States by Milestone Films, *The Big Animal* is having its theatrical premiere in New York City (February 20–29) at Anthology Film Archives, where you can enjoy the black-and-white cinematography of Pawel Edelman (*The Pianist*) and marvel at the wonderful harmony between the faces and bearing of Jerzy Stuhr and Rubio the Camel. For information: (212) 505-5181 or www.anthologyfilmarchives.org.

One of the true lovers of both cinema and New York City, Phillip Lopate, has helped program the Museum of Modern Art's new series "Waterfront: A Journey Around Manhattan in 18 Films" (February 27–March 4). Presented to celebrate the publication of Lopate's intricately essayistic new book *Waterfront*, the series ranges from Raoul Walsh's 1915 *Regeneration* (considered to be the first feature-length gangster melodrama) to Stanley Kubrick's 1953 *The Seafarers* (a promotional picture commissioned by the Seafarers International Union) to Mark Street's nonnarrative 2003 short *Fulton Fish Market*. All this, plus some of the usual suspects: *Dead End*, *On the Waterfront*, *Pickup on South Street*. For information: (212) 708-9480 or www.moma.org.

Finally, since this schedule is hopelessly confined to New York, I welcome the release on DVD of Ferid Boughedir's 1990 drama *Halfaouine: Boy of the Terraces*. Like the best of the French New Wave directors, Boughedir wanted to use the camera to explore the world—in this case, a quarter of Tunis—and did so by following the sentimental education of a boy. A wonderful film, now available (no matter where you live) from Kino Video. ■

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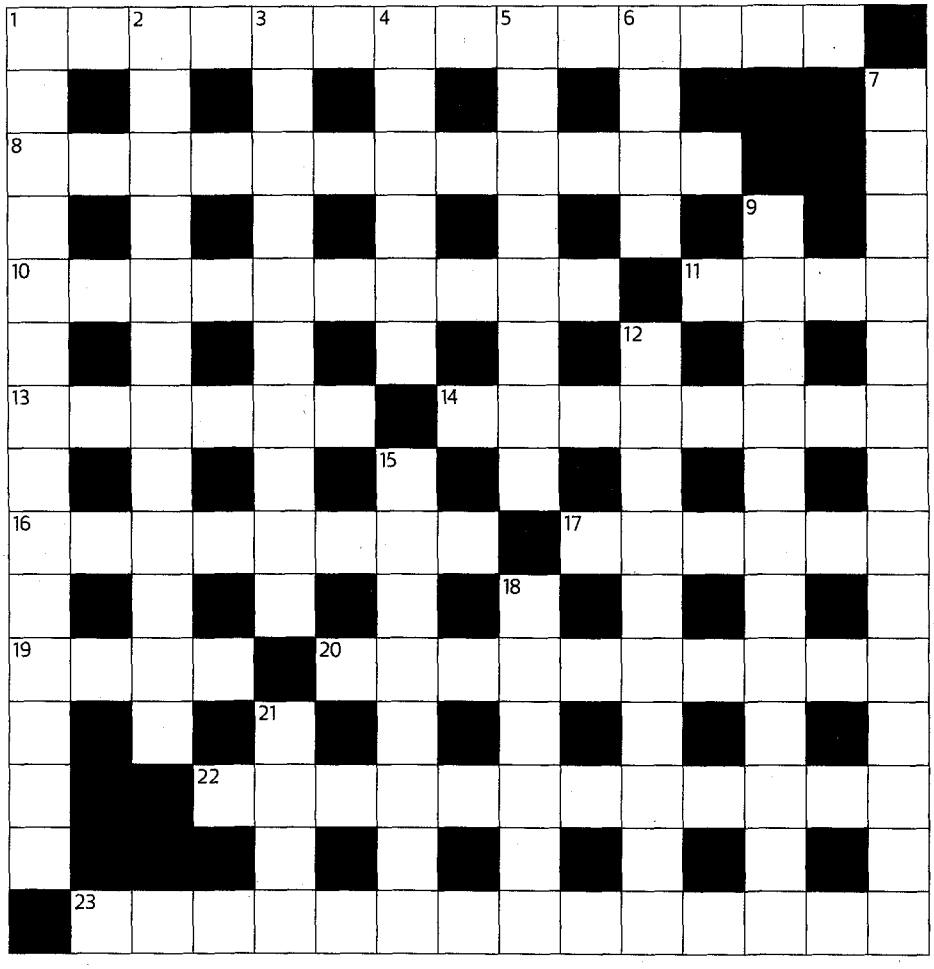

ACROSS

1 Perhaps a Man of Providence who has turned Communist may now be the Cock of the Walk. (5,6,3)

8 Lookouts on high places, where they get light from above. (A number with an unwound reel have tales to tell.) (12)

10 Doing something supposedly impolite, but making an indication of how I got no pint. (8,2)

11 To leave out something I'm to unfortunately put here? (4)

13 It's her problem, and also those other people's! (6)

14 Olivia's steward provides a dismal ending to Volume X. (8)

16 Softening as a way to get to liven it, up to a certain point. (8)

17 One might find an Ark a different place, but some make capital of it. (6)

19 What one might be expected to pass on the way out of school. (4)

20 One hears the way to the altar is a place where nags might not be so appreciated. (6,4)

22 Proving it's drier in the house—at least it helps to make it so. (12)

23 A not very bright hand-me-down from the judge, which might be declarative. (6,8)

DOWN

1 A certain kind of racehorse comes up with it out in LA, possibly, which is somewhat repetitive, but instructive. (14)

2 Not a sign of impartiality but a person's psyche, in part, ends incorrectly with a couple of points. (3-9)

3 Those who make certain crosses at least every four years choose to speak. (10)

4 It's possibly a gin sling that is putting you in a certain position. (6)

5 In place of the holiest shrine in Punjab it's a sort of rim placed on the Russian ruler. (8)

6 See 21

7 It was beastly traitorous, but the men in it were even more destructive. (3,6,5)

9 A bad Parisian has something commonly walked on, turning into a consolidation. (12)

12 It spells trouble with Geneva, and the tabulation is one that might be expected to save you. (10)

15 Draw straight lines through something, and declare you have an even better answer to the problem. (8)

18 The evil of publicity is intended to be good, if someone gives it to you. (6)

21 and **6** What they might call the ocean passed away, by the sound of it—but that's what the villain has been called. (4-4)

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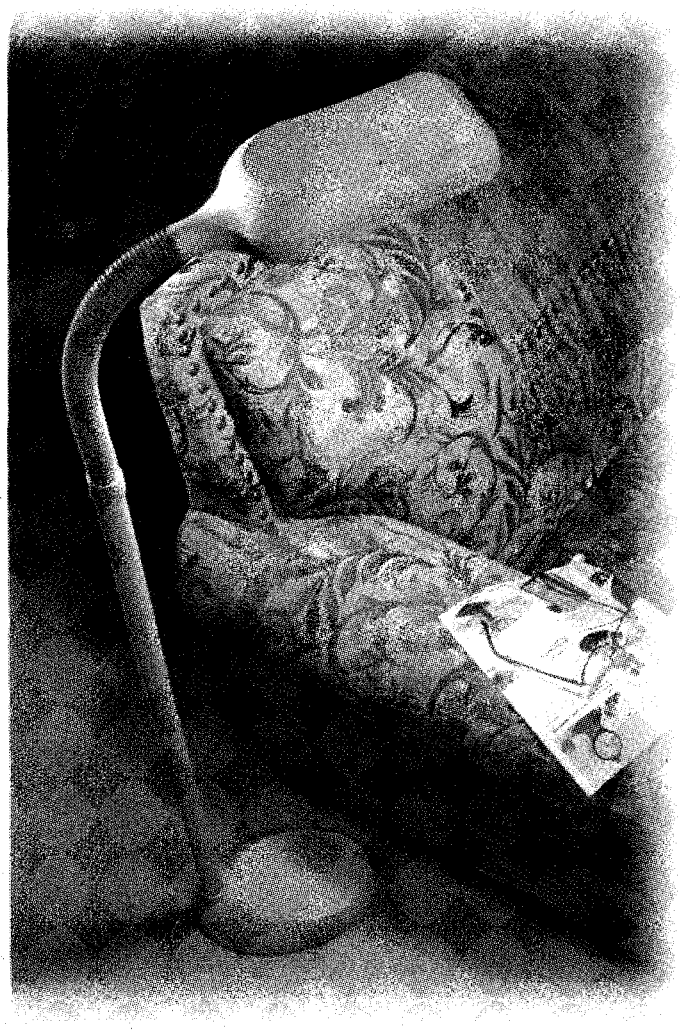

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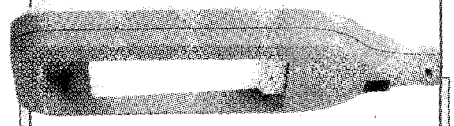

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